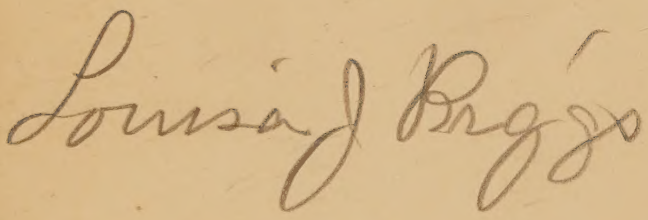
THE GIRL *From* TIM'S PLACE

CHARLES CLARK MUNN



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"For God's sake give me suthin' to eat."

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BY

CHARLES CLARK MUNN

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THE GIRL FROM TIM'S PLACE.

INTRODUCTION

When we leave the world's busy haunts and penetrate the primal solitude of a vast wilderness, a new realm peopled by mystic genii opens to us. Each sombre gorge, where twisted roots clasp the moss-coated walls, discloses fabled gnomes and dryads. Nymphs and naiads outline their shadowy forms in the mist of every cascade. Elfin sprites dance in the ripples of a laughing brook, and brownies scamper away over the leaf-swept hilltops.

A wondrous Presence, multiform, omnipresent, and ever fascinating, meets us on every hand, and there in those magic aisles and sombre glades, where man seems far away and God very near, Nature sits enthroned.

It is with the hope that a few of my readers may feel this forest-born mood, and in its poetic spirit forget worldly cares, that I have written the story of "The Girl from Tim's Place."

THE AUTHOR.

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PART I

CHIP McGUIRE

CHAPTER I

CHIP was very tired. All that long June day, since Tim's harsh, "Come, out wid ye," had roused her to daily toil, until now, wearied and disconsolate, she had crept, barefoot, up the back stairs to her room, not one moment's rest or one kindly word had been hers.

Below, in the one living room of Tim's Place, the men were grouped playing cards, and the medley of their oaths, their laughter, the thump of knuckles on the bare table, and the pungent odor of pipes, reached her through the floor cracks. Outside the fireflies twinkled above the slow-running river and along the stump-dotted hillside. Close by, a few pigs dozed contentedly in their rudely constructed sty.

A servant to those scarce fit for servants, a menial at the beck and call of all Tim's Place, and laboring with the men in the fields, Chip, a girl of almost sixteen, felt her soul revolt at the filth, the brutality, the coarse existence of those whose slave she was.

And what a group they were!

First, Tim Connor, the owner and master of this oasis in the wilderness, sixty miles from the nearest settlement; his brother Mike, as coarse; their wives and a half a dozen children who played with the pigs, squealed as often for food, and were left to grow up the same way; and Pierre Lubec, the hired man, completed the score.

There was another transient resident here, an old Indian named Tomah, who came with the snow, and deserted his hut below on the river bank when spring unlocked that stream.

Two occasional visitors also came here, both even more objectionable to Chip than Tim and his family. One was her father, known to her to be an outlaw and escaped murderer in hiding; the other a half-breed named Bolduc, but known as One-eyed Pete, a trapper and hunter whose abode was a log cabin on the Fox Hole, ten miles away. His face was horribly scarred by a wildcat's claws; one eye-socket was empty; his lips, chin, and protruding teeth were always tobacco-stained. For three months now, he had made weekly calls at Tim's Place, in pursuit of Chip. His wooing, as might be expected, had been a persistent leering at her with his one sinister eye, oft-repeated innuendoes and insinuations of lascivious nature, scarce under-

stood by her, with now and then attempted familiarity. These advances had met with much the same reception once accorded him by the wildcat.

Both these visitors were now with the group below. That fact was of no interest to Chip, except in connection with a more pertinent one — a long conference she had observed between them that day. What it was about, she could not guess, and yet some queer intuition told her that it concerned her. Ordinarily, she would have sought sleep in her box-on-legs bed; now she crouched on the floor, listening.

For an hour the game and its medley of sounds continued; then cessation, the tramp of heavily shod feet, the light extinguished, and finally — silence. A few minutes of this, and then the sound of whispered converse, low yet distinct, reached Chip from outside. Cautiously she crept to her window.

"I gif you one hunerd dollars now, for ze gal," Pete was saying, "an' one hunerd more when you fotch her."

"It's three hundred down, I've told ye, or we don't do business," was her father's answer, in almost a hiss.

A pain like a knife piercing her heart came to Chip.

"But s'pose she run away?" came in Pete's voice.

"What, sixty miles to a settlement? You must be a damn fool!"

"An' if she no mind me?"

"Wal, thrash her then; she's yours."

"But I no gif so much," parleyed Pete; "I gif you one-feefty now, an' one hunerd when she come."

"You'll give what I say, and be quick about it, or I'll take her out to-morrow, and you'll never see her again; so fork over."

"And you fotch her to-morrow?"

"Yes, I told you." And so the bargain was concluded.

Only a moment more, while Chip sat numb and dazed, then came the sound of footsteps, as the two men separated, and then silence over Tim's Place.

And yet, what a horror for Chip! Sold like a horse or a pig to this worse than disgusting half-breed, and on the morrow to be taken — no, dragged —to the half-breed's hut by her hated father.

Hardly conscious of the real intent and object of this purchase, she yet understood it dimly. Life here was bad enough — it was coarse, unloved, even filthy, and yet, hard as it was, it was a thousand times better than slavery with such an owner.

And now, still weak and trembling from the shock,

she raised her head cautiously and peeped out of the window. A faint spectral light from the rising moon outlined the log barn, the two log cabins, and pigsty, which, with the frame house she was in, comprised Tim's Place. Above and beyond where the forest enclosed the hillside, it shone brighter, and as Chip looked out upon the ethereal silvered view, away to the right she saw the dark opening into the old tote road. Up this they had brought her, eight years before. Never since had she traversed it; and yet, as she looked at it now, an inspiration born of her father's sneer came to her.

It was a desperate chance, a foolhardy step — a journey so appalling, so almost hopeless, she might well hesitate; and yet, escape that way was her one chance. Only a moment longer she waited, then gathering her few belongings — a pair of old shoes, the moccasins Old Tomah had given her, a skirt and jacket fashioned from Tim's cast-off garments, a fur cap, and soft felt hat — she thrust them into a soiled pillow-case and crept down the stairs.

Once out, she looked about, listened, then darted up the hillside, straight for the tote road entrance. Here she paused, put on her moccasins, and looked back.

The moon, now above the tree-tops, shone full

upon Tim's Place, softening and silvering all its ugliness and all its squalor. Away to the left stood Tomah's hut, across the river, a shining path bright and rippled.

In spite of the awful dread of her situation and the years of her hard, unpaid, and ofttimes cursed toil, a pang of regret now came to her. This was her home, wretched as it was. Here she had at least been fed and warmed in winters, and here Old Tomah had shown her kindness. Oh, if he were only in his hut now, that she might go and waken him softly, and beg him to take her in his canoe and speed down the river!

But no! only her own desperate courage would now avail, and realizing that this look upon Tim's Place was the last one, she turned and fled down the path. Sixty miles of stony, bush-encumbered, brier-grown, seldom-travelled road lay ahead of her! Sixty miles of mingled swamp, morass, and rock-ribbed hill! Sixty miles through the sombre silence and persistent menace of a wilderness, peopled only by death-intending creatures, yellow-eyed and sharp-fanged!

With only a sickening, soul-nauseating fate awaiting her at Tim's Place, and her sole escape this almost insane flight, she sped on. The faint,

spectral rifts of moonlight through interlaced fir and spruce as often deceived as aided her; bending boughs whipped her, bushes and logs tripped her, sharp stones and pointed sticks bit her; she hurried over hillocks, wallowed through sloughs and dashed into tangles of briers, heedless of all except her one mad impulse to escape.

Soon the ever present menace of a wilderness assailed her, — the yowl of a wildcat close at hand; in a swamp, the sharp bark of a wolf; on a hillside above her, the hoot of an owl; and when after two hours of this desperate flight had exhausted her and she was forced to halt, strange creeping, crawling things seemed all about.

And now the erratic, fantastic belief of Old Tomah returned to her. With him the forest was peopled by a weird, uncanny race, sometimes visible and sometimes not — "spites," he called them, and they were the souls of both man and beast; sometimes good, sometimes evil, according as they had been in life, and all good or ill luck was due to their ghostly influences. They followed the hunter and trapper day and night, luring him into safety or danger, as they chose. They were everywhere, and in countless numbers, ready and sure to avenge all wrongs and reward

all virtues. They had a Chieftain also, a great white spectre who came forth from the north in winter, and swept across the wilderness, spreading death and terror.

Many times at Tim's Place, Chip had sat enthralled on winter evenings, while Old Tomah described these mystic genii. They were so real to him that he made them real to her, and now, alone in this vast wilderness, spectral in the faint moonlight and filled with countless terrors, they returned in full force. On every side she could see them, creeping, crawling, through the undergrowth or along the interlaced boughs above her. She could hear the faint hiss of their breath in the night wind, see the gleam of their little eyes in dark places — they were crossing the path in front of her, following close behind, and gathering about her from every direction.

Beneath bright sunlight, a vast wilderness is at best a place peopled by many terrors. Its solitude seems uncanny, its shadow fearsome, its silence ominous. The creaking of limbs moving in the breeze sounds like the shriek of demons; the rush of winds becomes the hiss of serpents. Vague terrors assail one on every hand, and the rustle of each dry leaf, or breaking of every twig,

becomes the footfall of a savage beast. We advance only with caution, oft halting to look and listen. A stern, defiant *Presence* seems everywhere confronting us, and the weird mysticism of Nature bids us beware. By night this invisible Something becomes of monstrous proportions. Ghosts fashion themselves out of each rift of light, and every rock, thick-grown tree-top, or dark shadow becomes a goblin.

To Chip, educated only in the fantastic lore of Old Tomah, these terrors now became insanity-breeding. She could not turn back — better death among the spires than slaving to the half-breed; and so, faint from awful fear, gasping from miles of running, she stumbled on. And now a little hope came, for the road bent down beside the river, and its low voice seemed a word of cheer. Into its cool depths she could at least plunge and die, as a last resort.

Soon an opening showed ahead, and a bridge appeared. Here, for the first time, on this vantage point, she halted. How thrice blessed those knotted logs now seemed! She hugged and patted them in abject gratitude. She crawled to the edge and looked over into the dark, gurgling water. Up above lay a faint ripple of silver. Here,

also, she could see the moon almost at the zenith, and a few flickering stars.

A trifle of courage and renewal of hope now came. Her face and hands were scratched and bleeding, clothing torn, feet and legs black with mud. But these things she neither noticed nor felt — only that blessed bridge of logs that gave her safety, and the moon that bade her hope.

Then she began to count her chances. This landmark told her that five miles of her desperate journey had been covered and she was still alive. She began to calculate. How soon would her escape be discovered, and who would pursue her? Only Pete, her purchaser, she felt sure, and there was a possible chance that he might return to his cabin before doing so. Or perhaps he might sleep late, and thus give her one or two hours more of time.

And now she began to review the usual morning movements at Tim's Place — Tim the first one up, calling her, then going out to milking; the others, slower to arise, getting out and about their special duties. Pete, she knew, always slept in one of the two empty log cabins which were first built there. Her father slept in the other or in the barn. Neither would be called,

she knew — it was get around in time for breakfast at Tim's Place or go hungry. And so she speculated on her chances of early pursuit. Here on this bridge she now meant to remain until the first sign of dawn, then push on again with all speed. She already had a five-mile start, she was weary, footsore, and still faint from the awful terrors of her flight; to go on meant to rush into the swarm of spites once more, and so she lay inert on the hard logs watching, listening, calculating.

And now cheered by this trifling hope and lessening sense of danger, her past life came back. Her childhood in a far-off settlement; the home always in a turmoil from the strange men and women ever coming and going; the drinking, swearing, singing, at all hours of the night, her constant fear of them and wonder who they were and why they came. There were other features of this disturbed life: frequent quarrels between her father and mother; curses, tears, and sometimes blows, until at last after a night more hideous than any other her mother had taken her and fled. Then came a long journey to another village and a new life of peace and quietness. Here it was all so different — no red-shirted men to be afraid of,

no loud-voiced women drinking with them. She became acquainted with other children of her own age, was sent to school and taken to church. Here, also, her mother began to smile once more, and look content. For two years, and the only ones Chip cared to recall, she had been a happy schoolgirl, and then came a sudden, tragic end to it all. Of that she never wished to think. It was all so horrible, and yet so mercifully brief.

The one friend life held, her mother, had been brought home, wounded to death amid the whirring wheels of the mill where she worked; there were a few hours of agonized dread as her life ebbed away, a whisper or two of love and longing, and then the sad farewell made doubly awful by her father's frowning face and harsh voice. At its ending, and in spite of her fears and tears, she was now borne away by him. For days they journeyed deeper and deeper into a vast wilderness, to halt at last at Tim's Place.

Like a dread dream it all came back now, as she lay there on this one flat spot of security — the bridge — and listened to the river's low murmur.

The moon was lowering now. Already the shadow of the stream's bordering trees had reached her. First the stars vanished, then the moon

All the goblin forms and hideous shapes of Old Tomah's fancy were rushing and leaping about.

faded into a dim patch of light, finally that disappeared, a chill breeze swept down from a neighboring mountain, and the trees began to moan and creak. Then a fiercer blast swept through the forest, the great firs and spruces bent and groaned and screamed. Surely the spites were gathering in force again, and this was their doing.

Once more she began to hear them creeping, crawling, over the bridge. They spit, they snarled, they growled. The darkness grew more intense, no longer could the river's course be seen, but only a black chasm.

All through her mad flight the wilderness had been ghostly and spectral in the moonlight; now it had become lost in inky blackness, yet alive with demoniac voices. All the goblin forms and hideous shapes of Old Tomah's fancy were rushing and leaping about. Now high up in the tree-tops, now deep in the hollows, they screamed and shrieked and moaned.

And now, just as this fierce battle of sound and spectral shape was at its worst, and Chip, a hopeless, helpless mite of humanity, crouched low upon the bridge, suddenly a vicious growl reached her, and raising her head she saw at the bridge's end two gleaming eyes!

CHAPTER II

MARTIN FRISBIE and his nephew Raymond Stetson, or Ray, were cutting boughs and carrying them to two tents standing in the mouth of a bush-choked opening into the forest. In front of this Angie, Martin's wife, was placing tin dishes, knives, and forks, upon a low table of boards. Upon the bank of a broad, slow-running stream, two canoes were drawn out, and halfway between these and the table a camp-fire burnt.

Here Levi, Martin's guide for many trips into this wilderness, was also occupied, intently watching two pails depending from bending wambecks, a coffee-pot hanging from another, and two frying-pans, whose sputtering contents gave forth an enticing odor.

Twilight was just falling, the river murmured in low melody, and a few rods above a small rill entered it, adding a more musical tinkle.

Soon Levi deftly swung one of the pails away from the flame with a hook-stick and speared a potato with a fork.

"Supper ready," he called; and then as the rest seated themselves at the table, he advanced, carrying the pail of steaming potatoes on the hooked stick and the frying-pan in his other hand.

The meal had scarce begun when a crackling in the undergrowth back of the tent was heard, and on the instant there emerged a girl. Her clothing was in shreds, her face and hands were black with mud, streaks of blood showed across cheek and chin, and her eyes were fierce and sunken.

"For God's sake give me suthin' to eat," she said, looking from one to another of the astonished group. "I'm damn near starved — only a bite," she added, sinking to her knees and extending her hands. "I hain't eat nothin' but roots 'n' berries for three days."

Angie was the first to recover. "Here," she said, hastily extending her plate, "take this."

Without a word the starved creature grasped it and began eating as only a desperate, hungry animal would, while the group watched her.

"Don't hurry so," exclaimed Martin, whose wits had now returned. "Here, take this cup of coffee."

Soon the food vanished and then the girl arose. "Sit down again, my poor child," entreated Angie,

who had observed the strange scene with moist eyes, "and tell us who you are and where you came from."

"My name's Chip," answered the girl, bluntly, "an' I'm runnin' away from Tim's Place, 'cause dad sold me to Pete Bolduc."

"Sold — you — to — Pete — Bolduc," exclaimed Angie, looking at her wide-eyed. "What do you mean?"

"He did, sartin," answered the girl, laconically. "I heerd 'em makin' the bargain, 'n' I fetched three hundred dollars."

Martin and his wife exchanged glances.

"Well, and then what?" continued Angie.

"Wal, then I waited a spell, till they'd turned in," explained the girl, "and then I lit out. I knowed 'twas sixty miles to the settlement, but 'twas moonlight 'n' I chanced it. I've had an awful time, though, the spites hev chased me all the way. I was jist makin' a nestle when I seed yer light, an' I crept through the brush 'n' peeked. I seen ye wa'n't nobody from Tim's Place, 'n' then I cum out. I guess you've saved my life. I was gittin' dizzy."

It was a brief, blunt story whose directness bespoke truth; but it revealed such a pigsty state

of morality at this Tim's Place that the little group of astonished listeners could scarce finish supper or cease watching this much-soiled girl.

"And so your name is Chip," queried Angie at last. "Chip what?"

"Chip McGuire," answered the waif, quickly; "only my real name ain't Chip, it's Vera; but they've allus called me Chip at Tim's Place."

"And your father sold you to this man?"

"He did, 'n' he's a damn bad man," replied Chip, readily. "He killed somebody once, an' he don't show up often. I hate him!"

"You mustn't use swear words," returned Angie, "it's not nice."

The girl looked abashed. "I guess you'd cuss if you'd been sold to such a nasty-looking man as Pete," she responded. "He chaws terbaccer 'n' lets it drizzle on his chin, 'n' he hain't but one eye."

Angie smiled, while Martin stared at the girl with increased astonishment. He knew who this McGuire was, and something of his history, and that Tim's Place was a hillside clearing far up the river, inhabited by an Irish family devoted to the raising of potatoes. He had halted there once, long enough to observe its somewhat slothful condition, and to buy pork and potatoes; but this

tale was a revelation, and the girl herself a greater one.

This oasis in the wilderness was fully forty miles above here, its only connection with civilization was a seldom-used log road which only an experienced woodsman could follow, and how this mere child had dared it, was a marvel.

But there she was, squat on the ground and watching them with big black, pleading eyes. There was but one thing to do, to care for her now, as humanity insisted, and Angie made the first move. It was in the direction of cleanliness; for entering the tent, she soon appeared with some of her own extra clothing, soap, and towels, and bade the girl follow her up the river a few rods.

The moon was shining clearly above the tree-tops, the camp-fire burned brightly, and Martin, Ray, and Levi were lounging near it when the two returned, and in one an astonishing transformation had taken place.

Angie had gone away with a girl of ten in respect to clothing, her skirt evidently made of gunny cloth and reaching but little below her knees, and for a waist, what was once a man's red flannel shirt, and both in rags. Soiled with black mud, and bleeding, she was an object pitiable beyond

words; she returned a young lady, almost, in stature, her face shining and rosy, and her eyes so tender with gratitude that they were pathetic.

Another change had also come with cleanliness and clothing — a sudden bashfulness. It was some time ere she could be made to talk again, but finally that wore away and then her story came. What a tale it was — scarce credible.

At first were growing terrors as she plunged deeper and deeper into the shadowy forest, the brush and logs that tripped her, the mud holes she wallowed through, the ever increasing horrors of this flight, the blood-chilling cries of night prowlers, the gathering darkness while she waited on the bridge, the awful moment when she saw two yellow eyes watching her, not twenty feet away, her screams of agonized fear, and then time that seemed eternity, while she expected the next moment to feel the fangs of a hungry panther.

How blessed the first dawn of morning had seemed, how she ran on and on, until faint with hunger she halted to eat roots, leaves, berries — anything to sustain life! The river had been her one boon of hope and consolation, and even beyond the fear of wild beast had been the dread of pursuit and capture by this half-breed. When night

came, she had crept into a thicket, covering herself with boughs; when daylight dawned, she had pushed on again, ever growing weaker and oft stumbling from faintness.

Hope had almost vanished, her strength had quite left her, the last day had been a partial blank so far as knowledge of her progress went, but filled with eerie sights and sounds. From first to last the spites of Old Tomah had kept her company — by day she heard them, swifter-footed than she, in the undergrowth; by night they were all about, dodging behind trees, hopping from limb to limb, and sometimes snapping and snarling. The one supreme moment of joy, oft referred to, was when she had seen her rescuers' camp-fire, with human, and possibly friendly, faces about it.

It was a fantastic, weird, almost spookish tale, — the spectres she had seen were so real to her that the telling made them seem almost so to the rest, and beyond that, the girl herself, so like a young witch, with her shadowy eyes and furtive glances, added to the illusion.

But now came a diversion, for Levi freshened the fire, and at a nod from Angie, Ray brought forth his banjo. It was his one pet foible, and it went with him everywhere, and now, with time

and place so in accord, he was glad to exhibit his talent. He was not an expert, — a few jigs and plantation melodies composed his repertory, — but with the moonlight glinting through the spruce boughs, the river murmuring near, somehow one could not fail to catch the quaint humor of "Old Uncle Ned," "Jim Crack Corn," and the like, and see the two dusky lovers as they floated down the "Tombigbee River," and feel the pathos of "Nellie Grey" and "Old Kentucky Home."

Ray sang fairly well and in sympathy with each theme. To Angie and the rest it was but ordinary; but to this waif, who never before had heard a banjo or a darky song, it was marvellous. Her face lit up with keen interest, her eyes grew misty at times, and once two tears stole down her cheeks.

For an hour Ray was the centre of interest, and then Angie arose.

"Come, Chip," she said pleasantly, "it's time to go to bed, and you are to share my tent."

"I'd rather not," the girl replied bluntly. "I ain't fit. I kin jist ez well curl 'longside o' the fire."

But Angie insisted and the girl followed her into the tent.

Here occurred another incident that must be related. Angie, always devout, and somewhat puritanical, was one who never forgot her nightly prayer, and now, when ready for slumber, she knelt on the bed of fir twigs, and by the light of one small candle offered her usual petition, while Chip watched her with wide and wondering eyes. As might be expected, that waif was mentioned, and with deep feeling.

"Do ye s'pose God heard ye?" she queried with evident candor, when Angie ceased.

"Why, certainly," came the earnest answer; "God hears all prayers."

"And do the spites hear 'em?"

"There are no such creatures as 'spites,'" answered Angie, severely; "you only imagine them, and what this Indian has told you is superstition."

"But I've seen 'em, hundreds on 'em, big and little," returned the girl, stoutly.

Angie looked at her with pity.

"Put that notion out of your head, once for all," she said, almost sternly. "It is only a delusion, and no doubt told to scare you."

And poor Chip, conscious that perhaps she had sinned in speech, said no more.

For a long time Angie lay sleepless upon her fragrant bed, recalling the waif's strange story and trying to grasp the depth and breadth of her life at Tim's Place; also to surmise, if possible, how serious a taint of evil she had inherited. That her father was vile beyond compare seemed positive; that her mother might have been scarce better was probable. No mention, thus far, had been made of her; and so Angie reflected upon this pitiful child's ancestry and what manner of heritage she had been blessed or cursed with. Some of her attributes awoke Angie's admiration. She had shown utter abhorrence of this brutal sale of herself, a marvellous courage in endeavoring to escape it. She seemed grateful for what had been done for her, and a partial realization of her own unfitness for association with refined people. Her speech was no worse than might be expected from her life at Tim's Place. Doubtless, she was unable to read or write. And so Angie lay, considering all the pros and cons of the situation and of this girl's life.

There was also another side to it all, the humane one. They were on their way out of the wilderness, for a business visit to the nearest settlement, intending to return to the woods in a few days —

and what was to be done with this child of misfortune?

Most assuredly they must protect her for the present. But was there any one to whom she could be turned over and cared for? It seemed possible this brutal buyer of her would follow her out of the woods, to abduct her if found, and then the moral side of this episode with all its abominable possibilities occurred to Angie, who was, above all, unselfish and noble-hearted. Vice, crime, and immorality were horrible to her.

Here was a self-evident duty thrusting itself upon her, and how to meet it with justice to herself, her husband, and her own conscience, was a problem. Thus dwelling upon this complex situation, she fell asleep.

The first faint light of morning was stealing into the tent when Angie felt her companion stir. She had, exhausted as she doubtless was, fallen asleep almost the moment she lay down; but now she was evidently awake.

Curious to note what she would do, Angie remained with closed eyes and motionless. From the corner of the tent where she had curled up the night before, the girl now cautiously crept toward the elder woman. Inch by inch, upon the bed of boughs,

she moved nearer, until Angie, watching with half-open eyes, saw her head lowered, and felt two soft warm lips touch her hand.

It was a trifle. It was no more than the act of a cat who rubs herself against her mistress or a dog who licks his master's hand, and yet it settled once for all that waif's fate and Angie's indecision.

CHAPTER III

"Women are like grasshoppers — ye kin never tell which way they're goin' to jump." — OLD CY WALKER.

LEVI was starting a fire, Ray washing potatoes, and Martin, in his shirt-sleeves, using a towel vigorously near the canoes, when Angie and Chip emerged that morning; and now while breakfast is under way, a moment may be seized to explain who these people were and their mission in this wilderness.

Many years before, in a distant village called Greenvale, two brothers, David and Amzi Curtis, had quarrelled over an unfortunate division of inherited land. The outcome was that Amzi, somewhat misanthropic over the death of his wife, and of peculiar make-up, deserted his home and little daughter Angeline, and vanished. For many years no one knew of his whereabouts, and he was given up as dead.

In the meantime his child, cared for by a kindly woman known as Aunt Comfort, had grown to womanhood. About this time a boyhood sweet-

heart of Angeline's, named Martin Frisbie, who had been gathering wealth in a distant city, invited a former schoolmate, now the village doctor in Greenvale, to join him on an outing trip into the wilderness.

Here something of the history of a notorious outlaw named McGuire became known to Martin, and more important than that, a queer old hermit was discovered, dwelling in solitude on the shore of a small lake. Who he was, and why this strange manner of life, Martin could not learn, and not until later, when he returned to Greenvale to woo his former sweetheart once more, did he even guess. Here, however, from a description furnished by a village nondescript, — a sort of Natty Bumpo and philosopher combined, known as Old Cy Walker, who had been Martin's youthful companion, — he was led to believe that the queer hermit and the long-missing Amzi were one and the same.

Another trip into this wilderness with Old Cy, taken to identify the hermit, resulted in proving the correctness of the surmise. Then Martin set about making this misanthropic recluse more comfortable in all ways possible; and then, leaving Old Cy to keep him company, he returned to Greenvale and Angie.

A marriage was the outcome of his return to his

native village, and then, with his nephew, Ray, and long-tried guide, Levi, as helpers on this unique wedding trip, the hermit was visited.

It was hoped that meeting his child once more would result in inducing him to abandon his wild-wood existence and to return to civilization; and it did — partially. He seemed happy to meet his daughter again, consented to return with them when ready, and after a couple of weeks' sojourn here, the canoes were packed and all set out for civilization and Greenvale once more.

But "home, sweet home," albeit it was, as in this case, a lonely log cabin in a vast wilderness, proved stronger than parental love or aught else; and sometime during first night's camp on the way out, this strange recluse stole away in his canoe and returned.

"It's natur," Old Cy observed when morning came, "an' home is the hardest spot in the world to fergit. Amzi's lived in that old shack all 'lone for twenty years. He's got wonted to it like a dog to his kennel, an' all the powers o' the univarse can't break up the feelin'."

It seemed an indisputable, if disappointing, fact, and Martin led his party back to the hermit's home once more.

Another plan was now considered by Martin — to buy the township, or at least a large tract enclosing this lake, build a more commodious log cabin for the use of himself and his wife, and spend a portion of each summer there. There were several reasons other than those of affection for this decision.

This lake, perhaps half a mile in diameter, teemed with trout. The low mountains enclosing it were thickly covered with fine spruce and fir, groves of pine with some beech and birch grew in the valleys; deer, moose, and feathered game abounded here, and best of all, no vandal lumbermen ever encroached upon this region.

It was, all considered, a veritable sportsman's paradise. Most likely a few thousand dollars would purchase it, and so, for these collective reasons, Martin decided to buy it.

Old Cy was left to keep the hermit company; Martin, his wife, and Ray, with Levi, started for civilization to obtain needed supplies, and had been four days upon the way when this much-abused waif appeared on the scene. The party were journeying in two canoes, one manned by Ray, who had already learned to wield a paddle, which carried the tents and luggage; while the other was occupied by Martin, his wife, and Levi.

The only available seat for the new arrival was in Ray's canoe, and when breakfast was disposed of and the voyagers ready to start, she was given a place therein.

The river at this point was broad and of slow current, only two days' journey was needful to reach the settlement, and no cause for worry appeared — but Levi felt otherwise.

"You'd best hug the futher shore," he observed to Ray quietly when the boy pushed off, "an' don't git out o' sight o' us." "I ain't sartin 'bout the outcome o' this matter," he said to Martin later. "I know that half-breed, Bolduc, and he's a bad 'un. From the gal's story he paid big money fer her. He don't know the meanin' o' law, and if he follers down the tote road, as I callate he will, 'n' ketches sight o' her, the first we'll know on't 'll be the crack o' a rifle. The wonder to me is he didn't ketch her 'fore she got to us. He could track her faster'n she could run. I don't want to 'larm you folks, but I shan't feel easy till we're out o' the woods."

It wasn't reassuring.

But no thought of this came to Ray, at least, and these two young people, yielding to the magic of the morning, the rippled river that bore them

onward, the birds singing along the fir-clad banks, and all the exhilaration of the wilderness, soon reached the care-free converse of youthful friends.

"I never had nothin' but work 'n' cussin'," Chip responded, when Ray asked if she never had any time she could call her own. "Tim thinked I couldn't get tired, I guess. He'd roust me up fust of all 'n' larrup me if he caught me shirkin'. Once I had a little posey bed back o' the pig-pen. I fixed it after dark an' mornin's when I ketched the chance. He ketched me thar one mornin' a-weedin' it 'n' knocked me sprawlin' an' then stomped all over the posies. That night I went out into the woods 'n' begged the spites to git him killed somehow. 'Nother time I forgot to put up the bars, an' the cows got into the taters. That night he tied me to a stump clus to the bars, an' left me thar all night. I used to be more skeered o' my dad 'n I was o' Tim, tho'. He'd look at me like he hated me, an' say, 'Shut up,' if I said a word, an' I 'most believed he'd kill me, just fer nothin'. Once he said he'd take me out into the woods at night 'n' bait a bear trap with me if he heerd I didn't mind Tim. I told Old Tomah that, an' he said if he did, he'd shoot him; but Old Tomah wasn't round only winters. I hated dad so I'd 'a' shot him myself,

I guess, if I cud 'a' got hold o' a gun when he wa'n't watchin'."

"It's awful to have to feel that way toward your own father," interrupted Ray, "for he was your father."

"I s'pose 'twas," admitted Chip, candidly, "but I never felt much different. I've seen him slap mother when she was on her knees a-bawlin', an' the way he would cuss her was awful."

"But you had some friendship from this old Indian," queried Ray, who began to realize what a pitiful life the girl had led; "he was good to you, wasn't he?"

"He was, sartin," returned Chip, eagerly; "he used to tell me the spites 'ud fix dad 'fore long, so he'd never show up agin, 'n' when I got big 'nuff he'd sneak me off some night 'n' take me to the settlement, whar I could arn a livin'. Old Tomah was the only one who cared a cuss fer me. I used to bawl when he went away every spring, an' beg him to take me 'long 'n' help him camp 'n' cook. I'd 'a' done 'most anything fer Old Tomah. I didn't mind havin' to work all the time fer Tim. I didn't mind wearin' clothes made out o' old duds 'n' bein' cussed fer not workin' hard 'nuff. What I did mind was not havin' nobody who cared whether I lived or died, or said a good word to me. Some-

times I got so lonesome, I used to go out in the woods nights when 'twas moonlight 'n' beg the spites to help me. I used to think mother might be one on 'em 'n' she'd keer fer me. I think she was, an' 'twas her as kept me goin' till I found you folks's camp. I got awful skeered them nights I was runnin' away, an' when 'twas so dark I couldn't see no more, an' I heerd wildcats yowlin', I'd git on my knees 'n' beg mother to keep 'em away. I think she did, an' allus shall."

Much more in connection with the wild, harsh life Chip had led for eight years was now told by her. Old Tomah's superstition and belief in hobgoblins were enlarged upon. Life at Tim's Place, with all its filth, brutality, and nearly animal existence, was described in full; for Chip's tongue, once loosened, ran on and on, while Ray, spellbound by this description, was scarce conscious he was wielding a paddle. Never before had he heard such a tale, so unusual and so pathetic. Naturally of chivalrous and manly nature, it appealed to him as naught else could. Then the girl herself, with her big, pleading eyes, her queer belief in those woodsy, spectral forms she called spites, and her free and easy confidence in him, and his sympathy also, surprised Ray. Her speech was coarse and crude

— the vernacular of Tim's Place. Now and then a profane word crept in; yet it was absolute truth, and forceful from its very simplicity.

But another influence, more potent than her wrongs, was now appealing to Chip — her sense of joy at her rescue, and with it a positive faith that the spites had been the means of her escape.

"I know they did it," she said time and again, "an' I know mother was one on 'em. I wished I cud do suthin' to show 'em how thankful I am 'n' how happy I am now." And Ray, astonished that so keen-witted and courageous a girl should have such a fantastic belief, made no comment.

A more serious subject was under discussion in the other canoe, meantime, as to the future disposition of Chip herself.

"I feel it my duty to take care of her," Angie said, after relating her conversation with Chip and that morning's incident. "She is a homeless, outcast waif, needing education and everything else to Christianize her. We must bring her to the settlement, but to turn her adrift might mean leaving her to a life of vice, even if she escapes her brutal father and this worse half-breed. Then, again, I am not sure that her parentage will bear inspection. She has told me something about her earlier life, and

about her mother, who evidently loved her. One course only seems plain to me, — to take care of and educate this unfortunate."

"I am willing, my dear," responded Martin, who, like all new husbands, was ready to concede anything, "only I suggest that you go a little slow. You can't tell yet what this girl will develop into. She has had the worst possible parentage, without doubt. Her life at Tim's Place, and contact with lumbermen or worse, has been no benefit. She is grossly ignorant, and may be ill-tempered, and once given to understand that you have practically adopted her, you can't — or won't — have the heart to turn her off. Now we are to return to the lake and remain a month, as you know, and in the meantime, what will you do with this girl?"

This was reducing Angie's philanthropic impulses to a focus, as it were, and it set her thinking. Something more of this discussion followed, and finally Angie announced her decision.

"We must take the girl back with us," she said, "and begin her reformation at the camp. If she shows any aptitude and willingness to obey, we will take her to Greenvale. If not, you must arrange to get her into some institution."

impressed her as those of a youth of eighteen will a maid of sixteen; and now, with his voice appealing to the best in her, he seemed like Pan of old, once more wooing a nymph with his pipes.

No knowledge of this was hers, no consciousness of why she was happy came to her. She knew what spites were; but the god Pan and Apollo with his harp were unknown forms.

Neither did she realize that born in her soul that day, on the broad shining river, was a magic impulse woven out of heart throbs, and destined to mete out to her more sorrow than all else in her life combined.

She had entered the wondrous vale of love whose paths are flower-strewn, whose shores are rippled with laughter, and whose borders, alas! are ever hid in the midst of tears.

CHAPTER IV

"The wilderness allus seems full o' spectres 'n' creepin' crawlin' panthers. Sometimes I think it's God, an' then agin, the devil."— OLD CY WALKER.

TIM'S PLACE, this refuge in the wilderness, cleared and colonized by Tim Connor, was neither better nor worse than such pioneer openings in Nature's domain are apt to be. Tim, a hardy Irishman of sod-hovel and potato-diet ancestors, had been blacksmith for a lumber camp on this broad river and at its junction with a tributary called the Fox Hole years before Chip was born.

When all the adjacent lumber was cut and sent down this river, the camp was abandoned, and then Tim saw his opening. With his precious winter's wages he purchased a large tract of this now worthless land, induced a robust Bridget, his brother Mike, and his consort to join fortunes with him, brought in cows, horses, pigs, and poultry, and began farming with the lumber camp as domicile.

Another log cabin was soon added, the first crop of potatoes sold readily to other lumbermen farther

in the wilderness, the pigs in a sty adjacent to his own throve, the poultry multiplied, children came, and the red-shirted men coming into the wilderness or going out found Tim's Place convenient.

With this added business came an enlargement in Tim's ideas, the outcome of which was a framed house containing a kitchen and dining room and half a dozen others of closet-like proportions, furnished with box-on-legs beds. It was not a pretentious hostelry. Paint, shutters, and carpets were absent, benches served for chairs, the only mirror in it was eight by twelve inches, and used in common by Bridget and Mary. The toilet conveniences consisted of a wash-basin in the kitchen sink and a "last year's" towel, used semi-occasionally. A long table bare of cloth and set with tinware served in the dining room, warmed in winter by a round sheet-iron stove; above it usually hung an array of socks and mittens, and a capacious cook stove half filled the kitchen. It was the crudest possible backwoods abode, and yet compared to the log cabin first occupied by Tim, it was a palace, and he was proud of it.

In autumn swarms of lumbermen halted there, content to sleep on the floor if need be. In spring they came again, log-driving down stream; later

a few sportsmen occasionally tried it, and all fared alike.

There was no sentiment about Tim. If the citified fishermen objected to what they found, "Be gob, you kin kape away," he readily told them. A quarter for each meal, or a night's lodging, was the price, whether a bed or the floor was provided, and from early spring until frost came, all the occupants went barefoot.

When snow had made the sixty miles of log road to the nearest settlement passable, Tim invariably journeyed hither with horse and bob-sled for clothing and supplies.

No knowledge or news from the world reached here, unless brought by chance visitors. Sundays were an unknown factor, the work of clearing land and potato-raising became a continuous performance from spring until autumn; and the change of seasons, the rise and fall of the river, were the only measure of time.

An addition to Tim's Place, other than babies and pigs, came one fall in an old Indian who, by ample presents of game, soon won Tim's good-will and help in the erection of a log wigwam; but this relic of a vanishing race — reckoned by Tim as partially insane — remained there only winters, and

when spring returned, disappeared into the wilderness.

There were also two other occasional visitors both meriting description. First, a beetle-browed, keen-eyed, red-haired man garbed as a hunter, whose speech disclosed something of the Scotch dialect, and who, presenting Tim with a deer and two bottles of whiskey as a peace-offering on his first arrival, soon obtained a welcome. He told a plausible tale of having been pursued for years by enemies seeking his life; how he had been robbed and driven away from the settlements; and how two of these enemies had even followed him into the woods. He had been shot at by them, had killed one in self-defence, a price had been set upon his capture, dead or alive, and, all in all, he was a sorely abused man.

How much of this lurid and fantastic tale Tim believed, is not pertinent to this narrative. The stranger, calling himself McGuire, was evidently a good fellow, since he brought good whiskey, and Tim made him welcome.

The facts as to McGuire, however, were somewhat at variance with his assertions. He had originally been a dive-keeper in a focal city for the lumbering interests of this wilderness, had entertained swarms

of log-drivers just paid off and anxious to spend money, and when the law interfered, he retreated to a smaller town.

In the interval, strange to say, his moral nature — or rather immoral — suffered a brief relapse, during which he persuaded an excellent if confiding young woman to share his name and infamy.

His second business venture came to grief, however, and his wife deserted him and met with a fatal accident a few years after. In the meantime he had kept busy, exercising his peculiar talents and tastes in an individual manner, and evading officers, and his ways of money-getting were peculiar and diverse.

The Chinese Exclusion Act had just become operative, and the admission of Celestials into the land of the free, and of good wages, became a valuable matter. McGuire conceived the brilliant, if grewsome, idea of passing "Chinks" over the border line concealed in coffins. It worked admirably, and with accomplices on both sides to obtain certificates and permits, and take charge of the "corpses," a few dozen almond-eyed immigrants at two hundred dollars each obtained admission.

In time, this budding industry met an official quietus, and McGuire, with several warrants out

against him, took to the woods. He still continued business, however, in various ways. He smuggled liquor over the border by canoe loads, hiding it at convenient points, to exchange for log-drivers' wages. He killed game out of season, and dynamited trout and salmon on spawning beds for the same purpose; and, handy with cards, did not disdain their use in lumbering camps.

In all and through all his various ways of money-getting, one purpose had governed him — that of money-saving. Trusting no one, as he had reason to feel no one trusted him, he continually emulated the squirrels and hid his savings in the woods. A trapper and hunter by instinct, as well as thief, dive-keeper, smuggler, poacher, and gambler, he had in his wanderings discovered a cave in a slate ledge upon the shores of a small lake far into the wilderness. It was while trapping here that he found this by the aid of a fox which, while dragging a trap, became caught and held in a crevasse while attempting to enter it.

The fox thus secured, McGuire made further investigation, and by removing a loose slab of slate, he was enabled to enter a roomy cavern, or rather two small ones partially separated by slate walls. A little light entered the larger one, through a seam

crossing it lengthwise. They were free from moisture at this time — early autumn — and so secluded was the spot that McGuire decided at once to use this place as a hiding-spot for his money. The entrance could be kept concealed, its location served his purpose, and, fox-like himself, he decided to occupy what he would never have found without the aid of a fox, believing no one else would find it. It could also be used as a domicile for himself as well. A fireplace of slate could be built in it, an escape for smoke might be formed through the crack, if enlarged, and so this cave's possibilities increased.

There were still several other advantages. This lake was surrounded by precipitous mountains; no lumbermen, even, were likely to operate there; the stream flowing out of it soon crossed the border line, finding escape into the St. Lawrence valley at a point some twenty miles distant; a short carry enabled him to reach the Fox Hole which flowed by Tim's Place, and so this served as an excellent whip road in case of pursuit.

His transient asylum at Tim's Place also served as a vantage point in another way.

Here all who entered this portion of the wilderness invariably halted, — officers and wardens as well, — and as by this time McGuire had become an outlaw

murderer, with a reward offered for his capture, this outpost was of double advantage.

Caution was a strong point in his make-up, yet he was daring as well. He still visited the settlements occasionally, to sell furs and obtain ammunition and whiskey; and when he, as ill luck would have it, happened there at the time his child was left motherless, some malign impulse led him to take her to Tim's Place and leave her in servitude there.

There was also another chance caller at this outpost — a half-breed trapper and hunter named Bolduc, who had established himself in a lone cabin on the Fox Hole, some ten miles up from Tim's Place. He was a repulsive minor edition of McGuire. A wildcat, with laudable intentions, had essayed putting an end to his career, and succeeded to the extent of one eye and some blood. He had been the accomplice and partner of McGuire in many a whiskey-smuggling trip. He also dealt in this pernicious, but valuable, fluid, was a poacher ever ready to pot-hunt for a lumbering camp in winter, or find a moose yard on snow-shoes, after slaughtering the helpless inmates of which, he would sell them to the busy wood-choppers.

He, too, could be classed as brigand of the wilderness, and while no warrants or charges against him

were rife, he felt it wise to avoid meeting minions of the law. Tim's Place was a convenient point to obtain information as to location of new lumber camps or possible visits of officers. An occasional bottle of whiskey secured Tim's favor. The evenings and meals there impressed Pete with the advantages of owning a woman's services, and as Chip matured in domestic and other possibilities, a desire to possess her began to increase his visits.

His wooing met no response, however, and when persisted in always awoke on her part the same instinct once displayed toward him by a wildcat.

Then recourse to her father's greed for money was taken, with results as described.

The only thing that saved poor Chip from pursuit and capture, however, was his wholesome fear of her finger-nails, and the belief that it was best to let her father earn the balance of her price and fetch her, as agreed. Acting upon this theory, Pete had departed from Tim's Place at dawn, to await her arrival at his cabin, quite oblivious of the fact that his bird had flown.

All that long day he waited in great expectancy. Toward evening he returned to Tim's Place to learn that Chip had not been seen since the previous night; that her father had also vanished without

comment. That he was a party to this trick and deception, and, after securing his three hundred dollars, had taken her away, was Pete's conclusion, and he vowed a murderous revenge. He returned to his cabin, little realizing that twenty miles away poor Chip, faint with hunger and the terror of a vast wilderness, was fighting her way through bush, bramble, and swamp in a mad attempt to escape.

Neither did Tim, while regretting the loss of his slave, know or care that one of his occasional visitors was now a mortal enemy of the other, and that a tragedy, dark and grewsome, would be its outcome.

CHAPTER V

"The size o' a toad is allus reg'lated by the size o' the puddle." — OLD CY WALKER.

A WEEK was spent by Martin and his party at the settlement, during which he acquired the title to township forty-four, range ten, which included the little lake near the hermit's hut, and made a four-square-mile tract about it.

Chip, thanks to Angie, secured a simple outfit of apparel and — surprising fact — evinced excellent taste in its selection, thereby proving that eight years of isolation and a gunny-sack and red-shirt garb had not obliterated the deepest instinct of woman.

To Levi, Martin's woodwise helper, was left the selection of fittings for the new camp. A couple of husky Canucks were engaged to bring them in in a bateau, and then the party started on its return.

Only one incident of importance occurred during the wait at this village known as Grindstone. Angie and Chip had just left the only store there, in front of which a group of log-drivers had congregated, when Angie, glancing back, saw that one of the

group was following them. She quickened her pace, and so did he, until just as they turned into a side street, he passed them, halted, and turned about.

"Wal, I'm damned if 'tain't Chip, an' dressed like a leddy," he exclaimed, as they drew near.

"Hullo, Chip," he added, as they passed, "when did you strike luck?"

Chip made no response and he muttered again, "Wal, I'm damned, jest like a leddy!"

It was annoying, especially to Angie, and neither of the two realized how soon this blunt log-driver's discovery would reach Tim's Place.

And now, leaving the bateau to follow, the party started once more on their journey into the wilderness. No sight or sign of pursuit from the half-breed had been thus far observed. A few idle lumbermen in the village — the only visible connection between the vast forest and a busy world — were little thought of, as their canoes crept slowly up the narrowing river and gave no hint of interference from this low brute to any one except Levi.

He, however, seldom speaking, but ever acting, kept watch and ward continually. At every bend of the stream his eyes were alert to catch the first sight of a down-coming canoe in time to conceal

Chip, as he decided must be done. When night camps were made, a site at the head of the lagoon or up some tributary stream was selected, and while not even hinting his reason for this, he felt it wise. As they drew near to Tim's Place, it began to occur to Martin that Chip's presence had best be concealed until that point was passed. He also desired to learn the situation there. He had always halted at this clearing in all his up-river journeys, so far, usually to buy pork and potatoes, and he now intended to do so again. He also felt it imperative to conceal Chip in Ray's canoe, before they reached Tim's Place, and let Ray paddle slowly on while the halt was made. But Levi dissented.

"'Tain't best," he said, "to let Tim know there's two canoes of us and one not stoppin'. It'll make him s'picious o' suthin, 'n' what he 'spects, Pete'll find out. I callate we'd best pass thar in the night, leave the wimmen above, 'n' you 'n' I go back 'n' git what we want."

"But what about the Canucks following us with the bateau?" returned Martin. "They'll tell who is with us, won't they?"

"They didn't see us start," answered Levi, "'n' can't swear wimmen came. We'll say we're alone, 'n' bein' so'll make it plausible, 'n' you might say we're

goin' to build a camp 'n' 'nother season fetch our wimmen in."

"But how about our men, on the return trip, after finding we have women at the camp?" rejoined Martin. "They will be sure to tell all they know on the way back."

"We've got to keep the wimmen shady, an' fool 'em," answered Levi. And so his plan was adopted.

It was in the early hours of morning when the two canoes crept noiselessly past Tim's Place. The stars barely outlined the river's course, the frame dwelling, log cabin, and stump-dotted slope back of them. All the untidiness existent about this dwelling was hid in darkness, and only the faint sounds and odors betrayed these conditions. But every eye and ear in the two canoes was alert, paddles were dipped without sound, and Chip's heart was beating so loudly that it seemed to her Tim and all his family must be awakened. Her recent escape from this spot and all the reasons forcing it, the fear that both her father and the half-breed might even now be there, added dread; and not until a bend hid even the shadowy view of this plague spot did she breathe easier.

"I was nigh skeered to death," she whispered to Ray when safety seemed assured, "an' if ever

Pete finds I'm up whar the folks is goin', I'm a goner."

"Oh, we'll take care of you," returned that boy, with the boundless confidence of youth; "my uncle can shoot as well as any one, and then Old Cy is up at the camp, and he's a wonder with a rifle. Why, I've seen him hit a crow a half-mile off!"

Smoke was ascending from the chimney, and the rising sun was just visible when Martin and Levi returned to Tim's. Mike was out in an enclosure, milking; Tim was back of the house, preparing the pigs' breakfast. The pigs were squealing, and a group of unwashed children were watching operations, when Martin appeared. A pleasant "Good morning" from him and a gruff one from Tim was the introduction, and then that stolid pioneer started for the sty. Not even the unusual event of a caller could hinder him from the one duty he most enjoyed, — the care of his beloved swine.

"You have some nice thrifty pigs," began Martin, when the pen was reached, desiring to placate Tim.

"They are thot," he returned.

"My guide and I are on our way into the woods, to build a camp," continued Martin, anxious to have his errand over with, "and we halted to buy a few potatoes of you and some pork. I have a couple

of men following with a bateau," he continued, after pausing for a reply which did not come; "they will be along in a day or two with most of our supplies; but I felt sure I could get some extra good pork of you and some choice potatoes."

"You kin thot same," replied Tim, his demeanor obviously softening under this flattery, and so business relations were established.

Martin had intended asking some cautious question regarding Chip or her father; but Tim's surly face, his unresponsive manner, and a mistrust of its wisdom prevented. He was blunt of speech, almost to the verge of insolence, and the arrival of Martin with all his polite words evoked not a vestige of welcome; and yet back of those keen gray eyes of his a deal of cunning might lurk, thought Martin.

Two slovenly women peered out of back door and window while the interview was in progress. Mike came and looked on in silence; two of the oldest children were down by the canoe where Levi waited; the rest, open-eyed and astonished, seemed likely to be trodden on by some one each moment. When the stores were secured and paid for, and Martin had pushed off with Levi, he realized something of the life Chip must have led there.

He had intended not only to obtain potatoes, but some information of value. He obtained the goods, paying a thrifty price, also a good bit of cold shoulder, and that was all.

But Levi, shrewd woodsman that he was, fared better.

"I larned Chip's gone off with old McGuire," he asserted with a quiet smile when they were well away, "an' that Pete's swearin' murder agin him."

"And how?" responded Martin, in astonishment. "I felt that silence was golden with that surly chap, and didn't ask a question."

"I'm glad," rejoined Levi. "I wanted to tell you not to, and I've larned all we want. Children are easy to pump, an' I did it 'thout wakin' a hint o' 'spicion. Tim's folks all believe Chip's gone with her dad. Pete thinks so, an' is watchin' for him with a gun, I 'spect, an' if so, the sooner they meet, the better."

It was gratifying news to Martin, and when the other canoe was reached, the two again pushed on, with Martin, at least, feeling that the ways of Fate might prove acceptable.

Three days more were consumed in reaching the lake now owned by him, for the river was low, carries had to be made around two rapids, and

when at last the sequestered, forest-bordered sheet of water was being crossed, Martin wished some titanic hand might raise an impassable barrier about his possessions.

Old Cy's joy at their return was almost hilarious. To a man long past the spasmodic exuberance of youth, loving nature and the wild as few do, the six months here with the misanthropic old hermit, then a month of more cheerful companionship, followed by the departure of Martin and Angie, made this forest home-coming doubly welcome.

But Chip's appearance, and the somewhat thrilling episode of her escape from Tim's Place and her rescue, astonished him. Like all old men who are childless, a young girl and her troubles touched a responsive chord in his heart, and on the instant Chip's unfortunate condition found sympathy. Her bluntly told story, with all its details, held him spellbound. He laughed over her description of spites, and when she seemed hurt at this seeming levity, he assured her that spites were a reality in the woods — he had seen hundreds of them. It was not long ere he had won her confidence and good-will, as he had Ray's, and then he took Martin aside.

"That gal's chaser's bin here 'bout a week ago,"

he said, "an' the worst-lookin' cuss I ever seen. I know from his description 'twas him. He kept quizzin' me ez to how long we'd been here, if I knew McGuire, or had seen him lately, until I got sorter riled 'n' began to string him. I told him finally that I'd been foolin' all 'long; that McGuire was a friend o' mine; that he'd been here a day or two afore, borrowed some money 'n' lit out fer Canada, knowin' there was a bad man arter him. Then this one-eyed gazoo got mad, real mad, 'n' said things, an' then he cleared out."

When Martin explained the situation, as he now did, Old Cy chuckled.

"'Tain't often one shoots in the dark 'n' makes a bull's eye," he said.

"I think you and I had better keep mum about this half-breed's call," Martin added quietly, "and if Angie mentions it, you needn't say that you know who he was. It will only make my wife and the girl nervous."

The two tents were now pitched at the head of a cove, some rods away from the hermit's hut, and well out of sight from the landing, and to these both Angie and Chip were assured they must flee as soon as the expected bateau entered the lake, and remain secluded until it had departed.

In a way, it was a ticklish situation. All knowledge that this waif was with Martin's party must be kept from Tim's Place and this half-breed, or she wouldn't be safe an hour; and until the Canucks had come and gone, she must be kept hidden. Another and quite a serious annoyance to Martin was the fact that he had counted on these two men as helpers in cutting and hauling logs for this new camp. Only man-power was available, and to move logs a foot in diameter and twenty feet long, in midsummer, was no easy task; but Levi, more experienced in camp-building, made light of it.

"We'll cut the logs we need, clus to the lake," he said, "float 'em 'round, 'n' roll 'em up on skids. It's easy 'nough, 'n' we don't need them Canuckers round a minit."

It was four days of keen suspense to Chip before they appeared. Neither she nor Angie left the closed tent while they remained over night, or until they had been gone many hours, and then every one felt easier.

The ringing sound of axes now began to echo over the rippled lake, logs were towed across with canoes, a cellar under the new cabin site was excavated, and home-building in the wilderness went merrily on.

While the men worked, Angie and Chip were not idle. Not only did they have meals to prepare over a rude out-door fireplace, but they gathered grass and moss for beds, wove a hammock and rustic chair seats out of sedge grass, and countless other useful aids.

Chip was especially helpful and more grateful than a dog for any and all consideration. Not a step that she could take or a bit of work that she could do was left to Angie; her interest and do-all-she-could desire never flagged, and from early morn until the supper dishes were washed and wiped, Chip was busy.

But Martin, and especially Levi, had other causes for worry than those which camp-building entailed. The fact that this "Pernicious Pete," as Angie had once called him, would soon learn of their presence here, and hating all law-abiding people, as such forest brigands always do, would naturally seek to injure them, was one cause. Then, there were so many ways by which he could do harm. A fire started at one corner of the hut at midnight, the same Indian-like malice applied to their two tents, the stealing of their canoes or the gashing of them with a hunting-knife, and countless other methods of

venting spite, presented themselves. In a way, they were helpless against such a night-prowling enemy. Over one hundred miles separated them from civilization and all assistance; an impassable wilderness lay between. The stream and their canoes were the only means of egress. These valuable craft were left out of sight and sound each night, on the lake shore, and so their vulnerability on all sides was manifest.

Then, Chip's presence was an added danger. If once this brute found that she was here, there was no limit to what he would do to secure her and take revenge. They had smuggled her past Tim's Place, but concealment here was impossible; if ever this half-breed returned, she would be discovered, and then what?

And so by day, while Martin and Levi were busy with hut-building, or beside the evening camp-fire when Ray picked his banjo and Chip watched him with admiring glances, these two guardians had eyes and ears ever alert for this expected enemy.

CHAPTER VI

"It allus makes me coltish to see two young folks a-weavin' the thread o' affection." — OLD CY WALKER.

THERE were three people at Birch Camp, — as Angie had christened it, — namely, herself, Ray, and Chip, who did not share Martin's suspicion of danger. A firm belief that a woman's aid in such a complication was of no value, coupled with a desire to save her anxiety, had kept his lips closed as to the situation.

Life here at all hours soon settled itself into a certain daily routine of work, amusement, and, on Chip's part, of study. True to her philanthropic sense of duty toward this waif, Angie had at once set about her much-needed education. A reading and spelling book suitable for a child of eight had been secured at the settlement, and now "lessons" occupied a few hours of each day.

It was only a beginning, of course, and yet with constant reminders as to pronunciation, this was all that Angie could do. The idioms of Tim's Place, with all its profanity, still adhered to Chip's

speech. This latter, especially, would now and then crop out in spite of all admonitions; and so Angie found that her pupil made slow progress.

There was also another reason for this. Chip was afraid of her, and oft reproved for her lapses in speech, soon ceased all unnecessary talk when with Angie.

But with Ray it was different. He was near her own age, the companionship of youth was theirs, and with him Chip's speech was ready enough. This, of course, answered all the purposes of benefit by assimilation, and so Angie was well satisfied that they should be together. Beyond that she had no thought that love might accrue from this association.

Chip, while fair of face and form, and at a sentimental age, was so crude of speech, so grossly ignorant, and so allied to the ways and manners of Tim's Place, that, according to Angie's reasoning, Ray's feelings were safe enough. He was well bred and refined, a happy, natural boy now verging upon manhood. In Greenvale he had never shown much interest in girls' society, and while he now showed a playmate enjoyment of Chip's company, that was all that was likely to happen.

But the winged god wots not of speech or manners. A youth of eighteen and a maid of sixteen are the same the world over, and so out of sight of Angie, and unsuspected by her, the by-play of heart-interest went on.

And what a glorious golden summer opportunity these two had!

Back of the camp and tending northwest to southeast was a low ridge of outcropping slate, bare in spots — a hog-back, in wilderness phrase. Beyond this lay a mile-long "blow-down," where a tornado had levelled the tall timber. A fire, sweeping this when dry, left a criss-cross confusion of charred logs, blueberry bushes had followed fast, and now those luscious berries were ripening in limitless profusion. Every fair day Ray and Chip came here to pick, to eat, to hear the birds sing, to gather flowers and be happy.

They watched the rippled lake with now and then a deer upon its shores, from this ridge; they climbed up or down it, hand in hand; they fished in the lake or canoed about it, time and again; and many a summer evening, when the moon served, Chip handled the paddle, while Ray picked his banjo and sang his darky songs all around this placid sheet of water.

And what a wondrous charm this combination of moonlight on the lake and love songs softened and made tender by the still water held for Chip! As those melodies had done on that first evening beside the camp-fire, so now they filled her soul with a strange, new-born, and wonderful sense of joy and gladness.

The black forest enclosing them now was sombre and silent. Spites still lurked in its depths and doubtless were watching; but a protector was near, his arm was strong; back at the landing were kind friends, and the undulating path of silvered light, the round, smiling orb above, the twinkling stars, and this matchless music became a new wonder-world to her.

Her eyes glistened and grew tender with pathos. She had no more idea than a child why she was happy. Each day sped by on wings of wind, each hour, with her one best companion, the most joyful, and so, day by day, poor Chip learned the sad lesson of loving.

But never a word or hint of this fell from her lips. Ray was so far above her and such a young hero, that she, a homeless outcast, tainted by the filth and service of Tim's Place, could only look to him as she did to the moon.

They laughed and exchanged histories. Oft-times he reproved her speech. They fished, picked berries, and worked together like two big children, and only her wistful eyes told the other why they were wistful.

Martin, busy at camp-building and watching ever for an enemy's coming, saw it not. Angie was as obtuse; the old hermit, misanthropic and verging into dotage, was certainly oblivious, and so no ripples of interest disturbed these workers.

Such conditions were as sunshine to flowers in aiding the two young lovers, so this forest idyl matured rapidly. Chip, perhaps more imaginative than Ray, since most of her education had been the weird superstition of Old Tomah, felt most of its emotional force, though unconscious of the reason.

"I dunno why I feel so upset all the time lately," she said one afternoon to Ray as, returning from the berry field, they halted on top of the ridge to scan the lake below. "Some o' the time I feel so happy I want to sing, 'n' then I feel jes' t'other way, 'n' like cryin'. When the good spell is on, everything looks so purty, 'n' when I come on to a bunch o' posies, then I feel I must go right down on my knees 'n' kiss 'em. When I was at Tim's

Place, I never thought about anything 'cept to get my work done 'n' keep from gettin' cussed 'n' licked. I was scart, too, most o' the time, 'n' kept feelin' suthin awful was goin' to happen to me. Now that's 'most gone, but I feel a heartache in place on't. I allus hev a spell o' feelin' so every mornin' when I wake up 'n' hear the birds singin'. They 'fect me so that I'm near cryin' 'fore I git up. You 'n' Mis' Frisbie 'n' everybody's been so good to me, I guess it's made me silly. Then thar's 'nother thing worries me, an' that's goin' to the settlement whar you folks is from. I feel I kin sorter earn my keepin' here, but I s'pose I can't thar, 'n' that bothers me. If only you 'n' all the rest was goin' to stay here all the time 'n' I could work some, same as I do now, an' be with you odd spells 'n' evenin's, I'd be so happy. It 'ud be jest like the spot Old Tomah said we're goin' to when we die. He used to tell how 'twas summer thar all the time, with game plenty, berries ripe, flowers growin', too, all the year 'round, 'n' birds singin'. He believed thar was two places somewhar: one for white folks and one fer Injuns; that when we died we turned into spites, stayed 'round till we got revenge for everything bad done us, or got a chance to pay up what good we owed for."

"I don't know where we go to when we quit this world, and neither does anybody else, I believe," Ray answered philosophically, and scarce understanding Chip's mood. "I believe, as Old Cy does, that the time to be happy is when we are young and can be; that when we are ready to leave this world is time enough for another one. As to your worrying about your going to Greenvale," he added confidently, and encircling Chip's waist with one arm, "why, you've got me to look out for you, and then Angie won't begrudge you your keep, so don't think about that." And then this young optimist, quite content with what the gods had provided in this maid of sweet lip and appealing eye, assured her she had everything to make her happy, including himself for companion; that all her moody spells were merely memories of Tim's Place, best forgotten, and much more of equally tender and silly import.

Not for one instant did he realize the growing independence and self-reliance of this wilderness waif, or how the first feeling that she was a burden upon these kind people would chafe and vex her defiant nature, until she would scorn even love, to escape it.

Just now the tender impulse of first love was

all Ray felt or considered. This girl of sweet sixteen and utter confidence in him was so enthralling in spite of her crude speech and lack of education, her kisses were so much his to take whenever chance offered, and himself such a young hero in her sight, that he thought of naught else.

In this, or at least so far as his reasoning went, they were like two grown-up children entering a new world — the enchanted garden of love. Or like two souls merged into one in impulse, yet in no wise conscious why or for what all-wise purpose.

For them alone the sun shone, birds sang, leaves rustled, flowers bloomed, and the blue lake rippled. For them alone was all this charming chance given, with all that made it entrancing. For them alone was life, love, and lips that met in ecstasy.

Oh, wondrous beatitude! Oh, heaven-born joy! Oh, divine illusion that builds the world anew, and building thus, believes its secret safe!

But Old Cy, wise old observer of all things human, from the natural attraction of two children to the philosophy of content, saw and understood.

Not for worlds would he hint this to Angie or

Martin. Full well he knew how soon this "weavin' o' the threads o' affection," would be frowned upon by them; but he loved children as few men do.

This summer-day budding of romance would end in a few weeks, these two were happy now — let them remain so, and perhaps in Chip's case it might prove the one best incentive to her own improvement.

And now as he watched them day by day, came another feeling. Homeless all his life so far, and for many years a wanderer, these two had awakened the home-building impulse in his. He could not have a home himself, he could only help them to one in the future, and to that end and purpose he now bent his thought.

The weeks there with Ray had opened Old Cy's heart to him. Even sooner, and with greater force, had Chip's helpless condition made the same appeal, and as he watched her wistful eyes and willing ways, in spite of her speech and in spite of her origin, he saw in her the making of a good wife and mother. Her heritage, as he now guessed, was of the worst, her education was yet to be obtained; but for all that, a girl — no, a child — of sixteen who would dare sixty miles of

wilderness alone to save herself from a shameful fate, was of the metal and fibre to win, and more than that, deserved the best that life afforded.

How he could at present aid her, he saw not. A few years of help and time to study must be given her, and as Old Cy realized how much must be done for her and how uncertain it was whether Angie would find time, or be willing to do it, then and there he determined to share that duty with her.

It was midsummer when Martin and his party returned to the lake with Chip. In two weeks the new log cabin — a large one, divided into three compartments — was erected and ready for occupation, and so convenient and picturesque a wildwood dwelling was it that a brief description may be tolerated.

All log cabins are much alike — a square enclosure of unhewn logs thatched with saplings and chinked with mud and moss. A low door of boards or split poles is the usual entrance, with one small window for light; its floor may be of small split logs or mother earth, and at best it is a cramped, cheerless hovel.

But Martin's was a more pretentious creation. Its location, well out on the birch-clad point, back

of which stood the hermit's hut, commanded a view of the lake. A group of tall-stemmed spruce, amid which it stood, gave shade, yet allowed observation. It was of oblong shape, with a wide piazza of white birch poles and roof of same; two four-pane windows to each room gave ample light; a small Franklin stove had been brought for the sitting room, and a cook stove occupied the "lean-to" cook room back of the main cabin. Beds, chairs, and benches were fashioned from the plentiful white birch stems, and floor and doors were of planed boards.

It was but a crude structure, compared to even the humblest of civilized dwellings; and yet with all its fittings conveyed into this wilderness in one bateau, and with only axes, a saw, and hammer for tools, as was the case, it was a marvel.

Working as all the men had done from dawn until dark to complete this cabin, no recreation had been taken by any one except Ray and Chip; and now Martin, a keen sportsman, felt that his turn had come. The trout were rising night and morn all over the lake, partridges so tame that they would scarce fly were as plenty as sparrows, a half-dozen deer could be seen any time along the lake shore — in fact, one had already furnished

them venison — and so Martin now anticipated some relaxation and sport.

But Fate willed otherwise.

One of Old Cy's first and most far-sighted bits of work, after being left with the hermit the previous autumn, had been the erection of an ice-house out of large saplings. It stood at the foot of a high bank on the north of the knoll and close to the lake, and here, out of the sunshine, yet handy to fill, stood his creation. Its double walls of poles were stuffed with moss, its roof chinked with blue clay, a sliding door gave ingress, and even now, with summer almost gone, an ample supply of ice remained in it.

In the division of duties among these campers, Levi usually started the morning fire while Old Cy visited the ice-house for anything needed. One morning after the new cabin was completed, he came here as usual.

A fine string of trout caught by Martin and Ray the day before were hanging in this ice-house, and securing what was needed, Old Cy closed the door and turned away. As usual with him, he glanced up and down the narrow beach to see if a deer had wandered along there that morning, and in doing so he now saw, close to

the water's edge and distinctly outlined in the damp sand, the print of a moccasined foot.

It was of extra large size, and as Old Cy bent over it, he saw it had recently been made. Glancing along toward the head of this cove, he saw more tracks, and two rods away, the sharp furrow of a canoe prow in the sand.

"It's that pesky half-breed, sure's a gun," he muttered, stooping over the track, "fer a good bit o' his legs was turned up to walk on, and he wore moccasins t'other day."

Curious now, and somewhat startled, he looked along where the narrow beach curved out and around to the landing, and saw the tracks led that way. Then picking his way so as not to obscure them, he followed until not three rods from the new cabin they left the beach and were plainly visible behind a couple of spruces, in the soft carpet of needles, which was crushed for a small space, where some one had stood.

Returning to camp, Old Cy motioned to Levi and Martin. All three returned to the ice-house, looked where the canoe had cut its furrow, took up the trail to its ending beside the two trees, and then glanced into one another's eyes with serious, sobered, troubled faces.

And well they might; for the evening previous they had all been grouped upon the piazza of this new cabin until late, while scarce three rods away a spying enemy, presumably this half-breed, had stood and watched them.

CHAPTER VII

"Blessed be them that 'spects nothin', they won't git fooled." — OLD CY WALKER.

CHRISTMAS COVE was never disturbed by aught except small boats, and few of them. It was a long, crescent-shaped arm of the sea, parallel to the ocean, and separated from it by a spruce-clad cliff; its placid surface scarcely more than rippled or undulated outside, and so shallow was it that each ebb tide left its sandy bottom bare.

A stream found devious way along this crescent when the outflow left it bare. Mottled minnows, schools of white and green smelts, crabs of all sorts and sizes, swam and sported up and down this broad, shallow brook while the tide was away, and few of human kind ever watched them.

Alongside this cove and inward a dozen or more brown houses and a few white ones faced its curving shore, a broad street with many elms and ruts between which the grass grew separated the houses

and cove, and a small white church with a gilt fish for weather-vane on its steeple stood midway of these dwellings.

A low range of green hills to the northward of this village shut off the wintry winds, at the upper end of the street a stream from a cleft in the hills crossed it, and here stood a mill, its roof green with moss, its clapboards brown and whitened with mill dust, the log dam above it half obscured by willows. To the right of this a short flume was entirely hidden by alders, and above the dam lay a pond, entirely covered with green lily-pads, and dotted by white blossoms all summer.

Beside the mill and nearer the roadway stood an ancient dwelling, also moss-coated, two giant elms shaded it, and the entire impression conveyed by the mill's drowsy rumble and splashing wheel on a hot August afternoon was — find a shady spot and take a nap.

These were the summer conditions existent at Christmas Cove. The winter ones may be left undescribed.

Just beyond where the mill stream crossed the road the highway divided, one fork following the trend of these hills to where a railroad crossed them, ten miles away; the other, running close

to the upper and marshy end of Christmas Cove to where a spile bridge connected the two uplands and thence over to another village called Bayport. This, the larger of the two, had once contained a shipyard, now idle, a score of its dwellings were vacant, and the two hundred or more of its population existed by farming, fishing, lobster-catching, and a small factory devoted to the production of sardines duly labelled with a French name.

Christmas Cove, however, was more respectable, with its hundred residents, mostly retired sea captains with an income, and no litter of lobster pots or nets to obstruct its one long, narrow wharf which reached out to deep water at the mouth of the cove. A few small pleasure craft were tethered to the wharf, and gardens, cows, and poultry were merely diversions here.

One other income it had, however, which was considered less plebeian than Bayport's — the money a score of city-bred people left each summer.

Keeping boarders was all right at Christmas Cove. It did not smack of trade and commerce. No smoke of engines, no dust of coal, no noise of hammer and saw, were parts of it. No odor from a canning factory, no wrack of dismantled boats, tarred nets, and broken traps, was connected with it. The

dwellings at Christmas Cove were roomy, few children were now a part of its population — scarce enough to fill the one schoolhouse presided over by Mr. Bell, and so each season a few dozen of the uneasy horde, always anxious to leave home and board somewhere, came here.

A daily stage line — an ancient carryall drawn by one sleepy horse — connected this village with the railroad. Its church bell called the faithful to Thursday evening prayer-meeting and Sunday service with unfailing regularity. Its one general store and post-office combined, was the evening rendezvous for a score of sea captains — grizzled hulks who had sailed into safe harbor here at last, and who watched the weather, discussed the visitors, and swapped yarns year in and year out.

Here also, many years before, when Bayport was more prosperous, the threads of a romance had been woven, and two brothers, Judson and Cyrus Walker, born at Bayport, and sailing out of it, had paid court to two sisters, Abigail and Amanda Grey, here at Christmas Cove.

It was, as such sailors' courtships ever are, intermittent. Six, eight, and sometimes twelve months marked its interims, until finally only one brother, Judson, returned to announce a shipwreck in mid-

ocean, a separation of their crew in two boats, and Abbie Grey, whom Cyrus had smiled upon, was left to wait and watch and hope.

In time, also, Judson and "Mandy" joined fortunes. In time, and after many voyages, during which he vainly tried to find some tidings of his brother, Judson, now Captain Walker, gave up the sea, and with wife and two young sons retired inland, purchased an abandoned farm in a sequestered valley, and began another life.

Another mating had also occurred at Christmas Cove, for Abbie, the other sister and the sweetheart of Cyrus, giving him up for lost, finally consented to share the ancestral home of Captain Bemis — once a sailor and now the miller, who had exchanged the sea's perils for that peaceful vocation.

His father had ground grist here for a lifetime, and passed on. His mother still survived when Abbie Grey, once the belle of the village and a boarding-school graduate, married Captain Bemis, twice her age, and her old-time romance became only a memory.

No children came to fill this great, cheerless house with laughter. The old mother was laid away in due time, Abbie, once a handsome girl, grew portly and became Aunt Abbie to neighboring children,

and finally all the village; and disappointed as she had cause to be, she turned her thoughts to good works and religion.

But Cyrus, adrift in an open boat with half the crew, was finally rescued by a whaler, after starvation had left him almost an imbecile. A four-year, compulsory voyage to southern seas followed; then another wreck and a year on an island, and then a chance meeting with another sailor from Bayport, and from whom he learned two unpleasant facts, — first that his sweetheart, Abbie Grey, was married; and secondly that his brother had been lost at sea.

One was true, of course, and somewhat disheartening to Cyrus; the other, as discomforting, but not true. It was simply a case of mistaken identity, his own disappearance being confounded with that of his brother.

This story served the purpose of so affecting Cyrus that he resolved never to set foot in either Christmas Cove or Bayport, and also never to allow any one there to know that he was alive.

From now on, also, he deserted the sea and became a wanderer. He first lived in the wilderness, where as trapper and hunter and lumberman he learned the woodsman's habits; and when mid-life was reached, having become sceptical of all things, he

finally settled down at Greenvale. Here, loving children and the woods, fields, brooks, and Nature more than raiment, religion, and respectability, he became a village nondescript, a social outcast, and — Old Cy Walker.

CHAPTER VIII

"The poor 'n' pious kin callate the crumbs fallin' from the rich man's table'll be few 'n' skimpy." — OLD CY WALKER.

AN enemy we can meet in the open need not appall us; but an enemy who creeps up to us by day, or still worse by night, in a vast wilderness, becomes a panther and an Indian combined.

Such a one had spied upon Martin's camp that night, and all the tales of this half-breed's cunning and fierce nature, told by Levi, were now recalled. Like a human brute whose fangs were tobacco-stained, whose one evil eye glared at them out of darkness, the half-breed had now become a creeping, crawling beast, impossible to trail, yet certain to bide his time, seize Chip, or avenge her loss upon her protectors.

Now another complication arose as Martin, Old Cy, and Levi left the spot where this enemy had watched them — what to do about Angie and the girl? From the first warning from Levi that they were in danger from the half-breed, Martin had

avoided all hint of it to them. Now they must be told, and all peace of mind at once destroyed. Concealment was no longer possible, however, and when Angie was told, her face paled. Her first intuition, and as the sequel proved, a wise one, was for them to at once pack up and quit the woods as speedily as possible.

But Martin was of different fibre. To run away like this was cowardly, and besides he cherished only contempt for a wretch who had played the rôle of this fellow, and was so vile of instinct. With no desire to do wrong, he yet felt that if sufficient provocation and the need of self-defence arose, the earth, and especially this wilderness, would be well rid of such a despicable creature.

Then Levi's advice carried weight.

"We ain't goin' to 'scape him," he said, "by startin' out o' the woods now. Most likely he's got his eye on us this minute. He knows every rod o' the way out whar we'd be likely to camp. He'd sure follow, an' if he didn't cut our canoes to pieces some night, he'd watch his chance 'n' grab the gal 'n' make off under cover o' darkness. We've got a sort o' human panther to figger on, an' shootin' under such conditions might mean killin' the gal. We've got to go out sometime, but I don't believe

in turnin' tail fust go-off, 'n' we may get a chance to wing the cuss, like ez not," and the glitter in Levi's eyes showed he would not hesitate to shoot this half-breed if the chance presented itself.

Old Cy's opinion is also worth quoting: —

"My notion is this hyena's a coward, 'n' like all sich'll never show himself by daylight. He knows we've got guns 'n' know how to use 'em. The camp's as good as a fort. One on us kin allus be on guard daytimes, an' when it's time to go out — wal, I think we ought to hev cunnin' 'nuff 'mongst us to gin one hyena the slip. Thar's one thing must be done, though, 'n' that is, keep the gal clus. 'Twon't do to let her go over the hog-back arter berries, or canoein' round the lake no more."

And now began a state of semi-siege at Birch Camp.

Chip was kept an almost prisoner, hardly ever permitted out of Angie's sight. One of the men, always with rifle handy, remained on guard — usually Old Cy, and for a few nights he lay in ambush near the shore, to see if perchance this enemy would steal up again.

With all these precautions against surprise, came a certain feeling of defiance in Martin. With Ray

for companion he went fishing once more, and with Levi as pilot he cruised about for game.

Only a few more weeks of his outing remained, and on sober second thought, he didn't mean to let this sneaking enemy spoil those.

But Old Cy never relaxed his vigil. This waif of the wilderness and her pitiful position appealed to him even more than to Angie, and true to the nature that had made all Greenvale's children love him, so now did Chip find him a kind and protecting father.

With rifle always with him, he took her canoeing and fishing; sometimes Angie joined them, and so life at Birch Camp became pleasant once more.

A week or more of happiness was passed, with no sight or sign of their enemy, and then one morning when Old Cy had journeyed over to the ice-house, he glanced across the lake to a narrow valley through which a stream known as Beaver Brook reached the lake, and far up this vale, rising above the dense woods, was a faint column of smoke.

The morning was damp, cloudy, and still — conditions suitable for smoke-rising, and yet so faint and distant was this that none but the keen, observant eyes of a woodsman would have noticed it. Yet there it was, a thin white pillar, clearly outlined against the dark green of the foliage.

Old Cy hurried back, motioned to Levi, and the two watched it from the front of the camp. Martin soon joined them, then Angie and Chip, and all stood and studied this smoke sign. It was almost ludicrous, and yet not; for at its foot must be a fire, and beside it, doubtless, the half-breed.

"Can you locate it?" queried Martin of his guide, as the delicate column of white slowly faded.

"It's purty well up the brook," Levi answered; "thar's a sort of Rocky Dundar thar, 'n' probably a cave. I callate if it's him, he's s'pected a storm, 'n' so sneaked to cover."

And now, as if to prove this, a few drops of rain began to patter on the motionless lake; thicker, faster they came, and as the little group hurried to shelter, a torrent, almost, descended. For weeks not a drop of rain had fallen here. Each morn the sun had risen in undimmed splendor, to vanish at night, a ball of glorious red.

But now a change had come. Wind followed the rain, and all that day the storm raged and roared through the dense forest about. The lake was white with driving scud, the cabin rocked, trees creaked, and outdoor life was impossible. When night came, it seemed a thousand demons were

wailing, moaning, and screeching in the forest, and as the little party now grouped around the open stove in the new cabin watched it, the fire rose and fell in unison with the blasts.

"It's the spites," whispered Chip to Ray. "They allus act that way when it's stormin'."

The next day the gale began to lessen, and by night the moon, now half full, peeped out of the scurrying clouds. At bedtime it was smiling serenely, well down toward the tree-tops, and Chip's spites had ceased their wailing.

Fortunately, however, Martin's quest for game had been successful. A saddle of venison, a dozen or more partridges, and two goodly strings of trout hung in cold storage.

But utter and almost speechless astonishment awaited Old Cy at the ice-house when he visited it the next morning, for the venison was gone, not a bird remained, and one of the two strings of trout had vanished.

In front, on the sand, was the same tell-tale moccasin tracks.

"Wal, by the Great Horn Spoon! if that cuss hain't swiped the hull business," Old Cy ejaculated, as he looked in and then at the tracks. "Crossed over last night," he added, noting where a canoe had

cut its furrow, "an' steered plumb for my ice-house! The varmint!"

But Martin was angry, thoroughly angry, at the audacious insolence of the theft, and the thought that just now this sneaking half-breed was doubtless enjoying grilled venison and roast partridge in some secure shelter. It also opened his eyes to the fact that this chap would hang about, watching his chance, until they started out of the wilderness, and then capture the girl if he could. For a little while Martin pondered over the situation and then announced his plans.

"There's law, and officers to execute it," he said, "if a sufficient reward be offered; and to-morrow you and I, Levi, will start for the settlement and fetch a couple in. I'll gladly give five hundred dollars to land this sneak behind the bars. If he can't be caught, we can at least have two officers to guard us going out."

All that day he and Levi spent in hunting. Another deer was captured, more birds secured, and when evening came plans to meet the situation were discussed.

"You or Ray must remain on guard daytimes near the cabin," Martin said to Old Cy. "My wife and Chip had better keep in it, or near it most

of the time; and both of you must sleep there nights. One or the other can fish or hunt, as needed. We must be gone a week or more, even if we have good luck; but fetching the officers here is the best plan now."

Levi was up early the next morning, and had the best canoe packed for a hurry trip ere breakfast was ready. No tent was to be taken, only blankets, a rifle, a bag of the simplest cooking utensils, pork, bread, and coffee. A modest outfit — barely enough to sustain life, yet all a woodsman carries when a long canoe journey with many carries must be taken.

There were sober faces at the landing when Martin was ready to start, — Chip most sober of all, — for now she realized as never before how serious a burden she had become.

No time was wasted in good-bys. Martin grasped the bow paddle, and with "Old Faithful" Levi wielding the stern one, they soon crossed the lake and vanished at its outlet.

And now, also, for the first time, Angie realized how much the presence of these two strong and resourceful men meant to her. All that day she and Chip clung to the cabin, while Old Cy, a long, lanky Leatherstocking, patrolled the premises, rifle in hand.

"We hain't a mite o' cause to worry," he said,

when nightfall drew near. "That pesky varmint's a coward, 'n' knows guns are plenty here, an' we folks handy in usin' 'em. I've rigged a fish line to the ice-house door, so it'll rattle some tinware in the cabin if he meddles it again. I sleep with one eye 'n' both ears open, an' if he comes prowlin' round night-times, he'll hear bullets whizzin' an' think Fourth o' July's opened up arly."

But for all his cheerful assurance, time passed slowly, and a sense of real danger oppressed Angie and Chip as well. Ray shared it also. He was not as yet hardened to the wilderness, and like all who are thus tender, its vast sombre solitude seemed ominous.

Only the hermit, with his moonlike eyes and impassive ways, showed no sign of trouble. What this half-breed wanted, other than food, he seemed not to understand; and while he helped about the camp work and followed Old Cy like a dog, he was of no other aid.

One, two, three days of watchful guard and evenings when even Old Cy's cheerful philosophy or Ray's banjo failed to dispel the gloom, and then, just as the sun was setting once again, a canoe with one occupant was seen to enter the lake and head for the landing.

CHAPTER IX

"The more I see o' the world, the better I like the woods."—OLD CY WALKER.

MARTIN'S journey to the settlement was a rushing one. The first day they wielded paddles without rest, and aided by the current made rapid progress. Both carries were passed before sunset, a halt made for a supper of frizzled pork, coffee, and hard tack; then on again by moonlight, and not until wearied to the limit at almost midnight did they pause, and hiding themselves in the entrance to an old tote road, they slept the sleep of weariness.

Tim's Place was sighted the next day, and now, at Levi's suggestion, Martin lay down in the canoe as they passed it, concealed beneath a blanket.

"It's best to be keerful," Levi said, when proposing this; "I wouldn't trust Tim a minute. Most likely he's found out whar the gal is, an' knows what Pete's up to. The two are cahoots together, 'n' if Tim saw you an' I both leavin', no tellin' what'd happen."

The journey from here on was slower, as no cur-

rent aided, and yet in three days and nights of paddling, Martin and Levi covered that hundred-mile journey and reached the settlement.

A stage and rail journey, consuming one day and night more, enabled Martin to reach the man he wanted — a well-informed and fearless officer named Hersey, and then, securing an assistant and a warrant for one Pete Bolduc, on the charge of theft, the three returned to the settlement where Levi had waited.

"I'm glad to get track of this half-breed," Hersey said on the way. "He has been the pal of the notorious McGuire for many years, and besides has been smuggling whiskey into lumber camps and slaughtering game out of season all the time. Like McGuire, he is hard to locate. No guide or lumberman dare betray him, and so it's a fruitless task to try to catch either. We have been after this McGuire for years. He killed one deputy and wounded another, as you may have heard. This Bolduc is a cat of the same color, but less courageous, I fancy, and yet as hard to catch. I think, for the sake of your guide," he added, "we'd better not enter the woods together. You two go on, saying nothing. My mate and I will say we are on a pleasure trip, and follow and overtake you in a few hours.

This will protect your man, and evade suspicion. Even these people at the settlement are half-hearted in aiding an officer. Most of them are fearful of house or barn burning if they give any information to us, a few are in secret league with these outlaws; and so you see our position."

Martin saw, and marvelled that any of the simple, honest dwellers at this small settlement, law-abiding as they seemed, would either aid or warn so red-handed a criminal as McGuire.

That fear of consequences might influence them, was possible, and yet all the more reason for assisting the law in ridding the forest of two such criminals.

But Martin, thorough sportsman that he was, and keen to all the world's affairs, understood but little of the conditions existent in the wilderness, or about the lives and morals of those who find a living thus.

He knew, as all do, that a few thousand lumbermen entered each autumn, and, much to his regret, made steady inroads toward its despoilment. He knew, also, that these men included many of excellent habits — sober, industrious workers with families which they cheerfully supported, and that there were also many among them whose sole ambition

was to earn a few hundred dollars in a season of hard work, that they might spend it in a few weeks, or even days, of drunken debauchery.

He was well aware that a few wandering hunters and trappers plied their calling here, and many of a mixed occupation, guiding sportsmen like himself in season, were engaged in lumbering or farming between times. This mixed and transient population, he knew, were neither better nor worse than the average of such pioneers — good-natured and good-hearted, though somewhat lax in speech and morals.

What he did not know, however, was that a few unscrupulous and disreputable men, half gamblers, half dive-keepers, followed these lumbermen into camp as ostensible hunters and trappers, but really gamblers, ready to turn a trick at cards, convoy a keg of whiskey in, or follow a moose on snow-shoes, kill and sell him, as occasion offered. Or that, when spring opened the streams, these same itinerant purveyors of vice spotted their possible victims, as a bunco man does a rural "good thing" visiting the metropolis, and when they reached town or city, steered them where harpies waited to share the spoil. A brief explanation of these facts were furnished to Martin by Warden Hersey, when,

after overhauling him, the parties joined about one camp-fire.

"We have," Hersey said, "in the case of this McGuire, a fair sample of the outcome liable to follow or attach to a man who makes a business of preying upon the vices and follies of the lumbering class. It is a sort of evolution in law-evasion and opportunity, encouraged and aided by the animosity which is sure to arise between the lumberman and us, whose duty it is to enforce the fish and game laws. These lumbermen, or a majority of them, feel and believe that the forest and all it contains is theirs by natural right; that no law forbidding them to obtain all the fish and game they can, is just; that such laws are enacted and accrue for the sole benefit of city sportsmen who, like yourself, come here for rest and recreation. It is all a wrong conclusion, as we know, and yet it exists. Now come these leeches like McGuire, who prey upon this hard-working class. Such as McGuire foster the prejudice and antagonism of the lumbermen in all ways possible, arguing that moose and deer are the natural perquisites of those who go into the woods for a livelihood, and belong to them as much as the trees which they have paid stumpage to cut. Also that we who come in to execute the laws are interlopers, who draw pay

for the sole purpose of robbing them of their rights. Of course, we receive no welcome at a lumbering camp, and not one iota of information as to what is going on or where a law-breaker may be found. More than that, they will protect the leeches who fatten on them in every way possible, even after, as in McGuire's case, they become murderers and outlaws, with a price set upon their capture. And here comes in the factor of terrorism. A few of these lumbermen might give information from a desire to aid the law, or to obtain a reward, did they not know that to do so would expose them to the inevitable fate of all betrayers.

"It is a community of interest, a sort of freemasonry that exists between these lumbermen and all who thrive upon their labors and hardships. Now this McGuire has preyed upon them for years, a notorious example of dive-keeper, gambler, smuggler, and pot-hunter. He is now in hiding somewhere in this wilderness, or, maybe, creeping up some stream with a canoe load of liquor bought in some Canadian town. He will meet and be welcomed by any lumber-cutting party just making camp next fall, sell them liquor at exorbitant prices, shoot and sell them venison, and when the snow is deep enough, he will follow and find moose yards,

and do a wholesale slaughter act, and not satisfied with this, will absorb any and all money these lumbermen have left by card games. And yet the moment I enter the woods to arrest him, their camps are closed to me, and word of my coming is passed along to others. The guides even, who are at the beck and call of you sportsmen, are, many of them, in secret sympathy with such as McGuire; or if not, dare not give any clews, and many a wild-goose chase has resulted from following their supposed information. Some of the wisest among them are beginning to realize that they must co-operate with us in the protection of fish and game, or their occupation will be gone. But even those sensible fellows — and they are increasing — hate to become informer, fearing consequences.

"There is still another side to this game situation," continued Hersey, filling and lighting his pipe, "and this is our laws, or rather, the selfishness of our law-makers. We have plenty of laws — and good ones. We impose a license tax upon all non-residents for the privilege of shooting or fishing. We limit the season and number of moose, deer, or trout which may be taken. This license, which is all right, produces an annual fund sufficient to employ ten wardens, where the State only employs one.

The result is that this vast wilderness is so poorly patrolled that a game warden is as much of a rarity as a white deer. Now and then one may be seen canoeing up or down some main stream, or loafing a week or two at some backwoods farm and having a good time. One may certainly be found at all points of egress; but a portion of the wilderness — the greater way-back region — is rarely visited by wardens.

"There is still one more point, and that is the pay which wardens receive. It is so small that capable, honest men cannot be obtained for what the State allows; and considering the large sums raised from this license tax, it is a mere pittance. The result is, we have to employ a class of men, many of whom are no respecters of the law themselves, or who may be bribed."

It was a full and complete explanation of the conditions then existing in the wilderness, and as Martin glanced at "Old Faithful" Levi lounging on his elbow, he understood why that astute guide had always avoided all possible reference to McGuire.

"This half-breed, Bolduc, is another sample of his class," continued Hersey, "and while we have no criminal charge, we can prove we know he is a pot-hunter, and I'll be glad to nab him, for an

example. I judge he is lurking about your camp, watching a chance to abduct this girl, and while it's an unusual case, it may serve our purpose nicely — a sort of bait, useful in alluring him into our hands. How we can catch him, however, is not an easy problem. He knows the forest far better than we do; every stream, lake, defile, or cave is familiar to him, and, cunning as a fox, all pursuit would be useless. Our only hope is to patrol the woods about your camp as hunters, or watch for another night visit, and halt him, at the muzzle of a rifle."

And now Martin turned the conversation to a more interesting subject — Chip herself.

"I saw the girl at Tim's Place," Hersey said, "and knowing her ancestry, felt curious to observe her. She appeared bright as a new dollar and a willing worker for Tim. Of course, it seemed unfortunate that she should be left to grow up there without education; and while her natural guardian being an outlaw gave the State an ample right to interfere, the proper officer has never seen fit to do so. It has been a case of 'out of sight, out of mind,' I presume, and while we have a law obliging parents to send their children to public schools so many months a year until a certain age, this is a case where no one has seen fit to enforce it."

"But what about her parents?" queried Martin, curious on this point. "Do you know whether they were legally married?"

"Why, no-o, only by hearsay," Hersey responded. "I've been told her mother was a Nova Scotia girl, a mill worker in one of our larger cities, and as no one ever hinted otherwise, I think it safe to assume that they were married. If not, there would surely have been some one to spread the sinister fact. It's the way of the world. I presume Tim knows the girl's history, but he is such a surly Irishman that I never questioned him. In fact, his surroundings, as you may have noticed, do not invite long visits."

But no visit or even halt at Tim's Place was now considered advisable. In fact, as Levi said, it was best to pass that spot at midnight. This suggestion was carried out, and in five days from leaving the settlement, Martin and the officers made their last camp at the lake where he had once seen a spectral canoeist.

CHAPTER X

"A swelled heart may cost ye money, but a swelled head'll cost ye ten times more." — OLD CY WALKER.

AN unexpected canoe entering a lake so secluded and so seldom visited as this lake must needs awaken the keenest surprise, and especially in the case of a party situated as this one was. Ray, who had just returned from a berry-picking trip over at the "blow down," and Old Cy, carrying his suggestive rifle, were at the landing some time before this canoe reached it, while Angie and Chip waited almost breathlessly on the cabin piazza. A stout, bare-headed Indian, clad in white man's raiment, was paddling. He glanced at the two awaiting him at the landing, with big black, emotionless eyes, and then up to the cabin.

As his canoe now grated on the sandy beach close by, he laid aside his paddle, stepped forward and out, drew his craft well up, and folding his arms glanced at Old Cy again, as if waiting for a welcome. None was needed, however, for on the instant, almost, came an exclamation of joy from Chip, and

with a "Hullo, Poppy Tomah," she was down the bank, with both her hands in his.

A faint smile of welcome spread over his austere face as he looked down at the girl, but not a word, as yet, came.

Old Cy, quick to see that he was a friend, now advanced.

"We're glad to see ye," he said, "an' as ye seem to be a friend o' the gal's, we'll make ye welcome."

The Indian bowed low, and a "How do," like a grunt, was his answer. A calm, slow, motionless type of a now almost extinct race, as he seemed to be, he would utter no word or move a step farther until invited. But now, led by Chip, he advanced up the path.

"It's Tomah, old Poppy Tomah," she said with pride, as Angie rose to meet them, "and he's the only body who was ever good to me."

"I am glad to see you, sir," Angie said, with a gracious bow and smile, "and you are welcome here."

"I thank the white lady — I not forget," came the Indian's dignified answer with a stately bow.

Not a word of greeting for Chip or of surprise at finding her here — only the eagle glance, accustomed to bright sunlight or to following the flight of a bird far out of white man's vision.

"We shall have supper soon," Angie added, uncertain what to say to this impassive man, "and some for you."

It was a deft speech, for Angie, accustomed to take in every detail of a man from the condition of his nails to the cut of his clothing, as all women will, had ere now absorbed the appearance of this swarthy redskin, and was not quite sure whether to invite him to share their table or say nothing.

But the Indian solved his own problem, for spying the outdoor fire to which Old Cy now retreated, he bowed again and strode away toward it.

"Me cook here?" he said to Old Cy. With an "Of course, an' you're welcome to," the question was settled.

Chip soon drew near, and now for the first time the Indian's speech seemed to return, and while Old Cy busied himself about the cooking, these two began to visit.

Chip, as might be expected, did most of the talking, asked questions as to Tim's Place, when he was there, and what they said about her running away, in rapid succession. Her own adventures and how she came here soon followed, and it was not long befor he knew all that was to be known about her.

His replies were blunt and brief, after the manner of such. Now and then an expressive nod or grunt filled in the place of an ordinary answer. He knew but little about the recent happenings at Tim's Place, as he had stayed there only one night since Chip departed with her father — as he was told. He had been away in the woods, looking for places to set traps later, and had no idea Chip was here.

As to Pete's movements, he was equally in the dark, and when Chip told him what her friends here suspected, he merely grunted. As he seemed to wish to do his own cooking, Old Cy, having completed his task, offered him a partridge and a couple of trout fresh from the ice-house, also pork and potatoes, and left him to care for himself.

He became more sociable later, and when supper was over and the rest had, as usual, gathered on the piazza of the new cabin, he joined them.

And now came a recital from Ray of far more interest to these people than they suspected.

"I saw a bear over back of the ridge this afternoon," he said, "or I don't know but it was a wildcat. I'd just filled my pail with berries, when way up, close to the rocks, I saw something moving. I crouched down back of a bush, thinking it might be

a bear, and if it was, I'd get a chance to see it nearer. I could only see the top of its back above the bushes, and once I saw its head, as if it was standing up. Then I didn't see it for quite a spell, and then I caught sight of its back again, a good deal nearer, and then it went into one of the gullies in the hog-back. It didn't wait to see if it came out, but cut for home."

"Did this critter sorter wobble like a woodchuck runnin'?" put in Old Cy.

"No, it just crept along evenly," answered Ray, "I'd see it when it would come out between the bushes."

"'Twa'n't a b'ar," muttered Old Cy, and then, as if the unwisdom of waking suspicion in Angie's mind occurred, he added hastily, "but mebbe 'twas a doe, walkin' head down 'n' feedin'."

No further notice was taken of Ray's adventure. The sight of deer everywhere about was a ten-times-daily occurrence, and Old Cy's dismissal of the matter ended it.

His thoughts, however, were a different matter. Full well he knew it was no bear thus moving. A deer would never enter a crevasse, nor a wildcat or lynx ever leave the shelter of woods to wander in open sunlight.

"I'll go over thar in the mornin'," he said to himself; "I may git a chance to wing that varmint 'n' end our worryin'."

And now Angie, more interested in spites and the weird belief which she heard that this Indian held than in the sight of a doe, began to ply Old Tomah with questions, and bit by bit she led him on toward that subject.

It was not an easy task. His speech came slowly. Deeds, not words, are an Indian's form of expression, and this fair white lady, serene as the moon and as suave and smiling as culture could make her, was one to awe him.

With Chip he had been fluent enough. She had been almost a protégée of his, a big pappoose whom he had taught to manage a canoe, for whom he had made moccasins, a fur cap and cape, who had listened to all his strange theories with wide-open, believing eyes, and, best of all, a helpless waif whom he had learned to love.

But this white lady, awe-inspiring as she was, now failed to induce him to talk.

Chip, however, keen to catch the drift of Angie's wishes and anxious to have her own faith defended, soon came to the rescue and induced Old Tomah to speak — not fluently at first, the "me" in place of

"I" always occurring, adjectives following nouns, prepositions left out in many cases; and yet, as he warmed up to his subject, his coal-black eyes were fierce or tender, and the inborn eloquence of his race glowed in face and speech.

And what a wild tale he told! Some of it was the history of his own race, beginning long before white men came. He related the contests of his people with wild animals, their deeds of valor, their torturing of prisoners, their own scorn of death and stoical endurance of pain. His own ancestors had been mighty chieftains. They had led the tribe through many battles, swept down upon their white enemies, an avenging horde, and were now roaming the happy hunting-grounds where he would soon join them. Mingled with this tale of warfare and conquest, and always an unseen force for good or evil, were the spites — the souls of all brute creation. How they followed or led the hunter! How they warned their own kind of his coming! How they lured him into unseen danger, and how they continually sought to avenge their own deaths! There were also two kinds of them, — some evil and the others good. The evil ones predominated, the good ones feared them, yet sought to interfere in all evil effort. These two hosts also had their own

warfares. They fought oftenest when storms raged in the forest. Then they swept the tree-tops and scurried over the hills in vast numbers, shrieking and screaming defiance.

Another apparition was oft referred to in this weird talk. A great white spectre and chieftain of all spites, who sprang from his abode in the north, whose breath was a blast of snow, howling as it swept over the wilderness — this ghost, so vast that it covered miles and miles of wilderness, was altogether evil. It spared neither man nor beast. The hunter trailing his game met death on the instant and was left rigid and upright in his tracks. Squaws and children huddled in wigwams shared the same speedy fate. Lynxes and panthers, deer and moose by the score, were touched by the same mystic and awful wand of death.

It was all an uncanny, eerie, ghostly recital; yet all real and true to Chip, whose eyes never once left the Indian's face while he was speaking. Angie, too, was spellbound. Never had she heard anything like it; and while believing it was all a mere myth and legend, a superstitious fancy, maybe, of this strange Indian, its telling was none the less interesting.

Ray was also enthralled, and he was half convinced

that the forest might, after all, contain spooks and goblins.

But Old Cy was only a curious listener. He, too, had woven many a fantastic tale of the sea, its storms and monsters leaping from the crests of waves, and all such figments of the imagination, and this fable was but the same. The only feature of passing interest to him was the fact that any Indian had such a vivid imagination and could relate such a mingled ghost story so coherently.

Old Tomah ceased speaking even more abruptly than he began, then looked from one to another of the group, perhaps to see if they all believed him, and then without a word or even "good night," he rose and stalked out of the cabin.

For a few moments Chip watched Angie and the rest, anxious to see how this explanation of her own belief affected them, and then Old Cy spoke.

"I'd hate to be campin' with that Injun," he said, "or sharin' a wigwam with him night-times. It 'ud be worse'n a man I sot up with once that had the jim-jams, 'n' I'd see spites and spooks for a week arter."

Angie's sleep was troubled that night, and in her dreams she saw white spectres and a man with a hideously scarred face and one eye watching her.

Ray also felt the uncanny influence of such a tale and "saw things" in his sleep. But Old Cy, who had securely barred the doors and then had rolled himself in a blanket with rifle handy, thought only of what Ray had seen that day and who it might be.

the lake, hoping that the girl he saw canoeing with a boy so often might come near enough for him to make a capture. Many times, when darkness served, he paddled close to where the cabin stood, and once landed and watched it for hours.

Growing bolder, as the days wore on, he hid his canoe below the outlet of the lake and taking advantage of this outcropping slate ledge with its many fissures, secreted himself and watched.

But some shelter, at least to cook and eat in, he must have, and this he found in a distant crevasse of this same ledge, and from this he sneaked along back of it until he could hide and watch the camp below. From this vantage-point, he saw that the girl no longer went out upon the lake, but remained near the cabin; then later, he noticed the two men leave the lake one morning. This encouraged him, and now he grew still bolder, even descending the ridge and watching those remaining at the cabin, from a dense thicket.

From this new post he saw that but one man seemed on guard, and almost was he tempted to shoot him from ambush and make a dash to capture his victim. Cautious and cunning, he still waited a chance involving less risk.

And now he saw that certain duties were performed

by these people; that one man and the boy always started the morning fire; that the girl invariably went to the landing alone for water, at about the same time. Here for the moment she was out of sight from either cabin, and now in this act of hers, he saw his opportunity to land from his canoe near this spot before daylight, and hide in the bushes fringing the shore here and below the bank, watch his chance and seize and gag her before an outcry could be made. To tie her hands and feet and to push the other canoe out into the lake, thus avoiding pursuit until they could get a good start, was an easy matter.

It was risky, of course. She might hear or see him in time to give one scream. The old man who had said foolish things to him, and now seemed to be on guard, would surely send bullets after him as he sped away; but once out of the lake, he would be safe. It was a dangerous act; yet the other two men might return any day, and with this in prospect, this wily half-breed now resolved to act.

Old Cy was up early that fatal morning. Somehow a sense of impending danger haunted him, and calling Ray, he unlocked the cabin door and began starting the morning fire. He wanted to get breakfast out of the way as speedily as possible, and then

visit this ridge, feeling almost sure that he would find where this half-breed had been watching them.

When Ray came out, and before the hermit or Chip appeared, Old Cy hurried over to the ice-house, and now Chip came forth as usual, and without a word to any one, she took the two pails and started for the landing. It was, perhaps, ten rods to this, down a narrow path winding through the scrub spruce. The morning was fair, the lake without a ripple.

Above the ridge, and peeping through its topping of stunted fir, came the first glance of the sun, and Chip was happy.

Old Tomah, her one and only friend for many years, was here. A something Ray had whispered the night before, now returned like a sweet note of music vibrating in her heart, and as if to add their cheer, the birds were piping all about.

For weeks the cheerful words of one of Ray's songs had haunted her with its catchy rhythm: —

> "Dar was an old nigger and his name was Uncle Ned,
> He died long 'go, long 'go."

They now rose to her lips, as she neared the lake. Here she halted, filled a pail, and set it on the log landing.

Nearer and nearer that unconscious girl it crept

From behind a low spruce one evil, sinister eye watched her.

And now Chip, still humming this ditty, glanced up at the rising sun and out over the lake.

A crouching form with hideous face now emerged from behind the bush; step by step, this human panther advanced. A slow, cautious, catlike movement, without sound, as each moccasined foot touched the sand. Nearer and nearer that unconscious girl it crept! Now twenty feet away, now ten, now five!

And now came a swift rush, two fierce hands enclosed the girl's face and drew her backward on to the sand.

Ray and the hermit were beside the fire, and the Indian just emerging from the hut where he had slept, when Old Cy returned from the ice-house.

"Where's Chip?" he questioned.

"Gone after water," answered Ray. And the two glanced down the path.

One, two, five minutes elapsed, and then a sudden suspicion of something wrong came to Old Cy, and, followed by Ray, he hurried to the landing.

One pail of water stood on the float, both their canoes were adrift on the lake, and as Old Cy looked out, there, heading for the outlet, was a canoe!

One swift glance and, "My God, he's got Chip!" told the story, and with face fierce in anger, he darted back, grasped his rifle, and returned.

The canoe, its paddler bending low as he forced it into almost leaps, was scarce two lengths from the outlet.

Old Cy raised his rifle, then lowered it.

Chip was in that canoe!

His avenging shot was stayed.

And now Old Tomah leaped down the path, rifle in hand.

One look at the vanishing canoe, and his own, floating out upon the lake, told him the tale, and without a word he turned and, plunging into the undergrowth, leaping like a deer over rock and chasm, vanished at the top of the ridge.

CHAPTER XII

"The man that won't bear watchin' needs it."
—Old Cy Walker.

While Chip, bound, gagged, and helpless in the half-breed's canoe, was just entering the alder-choked outlet of this lake, twenty miles below and close to where the stream entered another lake, four men were launching their canoes.

"It was here," Martin was saying to Hersey, "one moonlight night a year ago, that a friend of mine and myself saw a spectral man astride a log, just entering that bed of reeds, as I told you. Who or what it was, we could not guess; but as that spook canoeman went up this stream, we followed and discovered our hermit's home."

"Night-time and moonshine play queer pranks with our imagination," Hersey responded. "I'm not a whit superstitious, and yet I've many a time seen what I thought to be a hunter creeping along the lake shore at night, and I once came near plugging a fat man in a shadowy glen. I was up on a cliff watching down into it, the day was cloudy, and

'way below I saw what I was sure was a bear crawling along the bank of the stream. I had my rifle raised and was only waiting for a better sight, when up rose the bear and I saw a human face. For a moment it made me faint, and since then I make doubly sure before shooting at any object in the woods."

And now these four men, Levi wielding the stern paddle of Martin's canoe, and Hersey's deputy that of his, entered the broad, winding stream. The tall spruce-tops meeting darkened its currentless course, long filaments of white moss depended from every limb, and as they twisted and turned up this sombre highway, the air grew stifling. Not a breeze, not a sound, disturbed the solemn silence, and except for the swish of paddles and faint thud as they touched gunwales, the fall of a leaf might have been heard. So dense was this dark, silent forest, and so forbidding its effect, that for an hour no one scarce spoke, and even when the two canoes finally drew together, converse came in whispers. Another hour of steady progress, and then the banks began to outline themselves ahead, the trees opened more, a sign of current was met, and the sun lit up their pathway.

By now the spectral beard had vanished from the

trees, white clouds were reflected from the still waters, and the gleam of sandy bottom was seen below. The birds, inspired perhaps by the absence of gloom, also added their cheering notes, Nature was smiling once more, and not a hint or even intuition of the fast-nearing tragedy met those men.

And then, as a broad, eddying bend in the stream held their canoes, by tacit consent a halt was made.

Martin, his paddle crossed on the thwarts in front, dipped a cup of the cool, sweet water and drank. Levi wiped the sweat from his face, and Hersey also quenched his thirst. The day was hot. They had paddled ten miles. There was no hurry, and as pipes were drawn forth and filled, conversation began. But just at this moment Levi's ears, ever alert, caught the faint sound of a paddle striking a canoe gunwale. Not as usual, in an intermittent fashion, as would be the case with a skilled canoeist, but a steady, rhythmic thud.

"Hist," he said, and silence fell upon the group.

In the wilderness all sounds are noticed and noted, by night especially, because then they may mean a bear crawling softly through the undergrowth, or a wildcat, yellow-eyed and vicious, creeping near. But by day as well they are always heeded, and the crackle

of a twig, or the sound of a deer's foot striking a stone, or any slight noise, becomes of keen interest.

And now, from far ahead, came the steady tap, tap, tap. It soon increased, and then it assured those waiting, listening men that some canoe was being urged down-stream.

Without a word they glanced at one another, and then, as if an intuition came to both at the same time, Martin and Hersey reached for their rifles.

On and on came the steady thump, thump.

Just ahead the stream narrowed and curved out of sight. A few foam flecks from an unseen rill above floated down. The white sandy bottom showed in the clear water.

And then, as those stern-faced, watching, listening men, rifles in hand, almost side by side, waited there, out from behind this bend shot a canoe.

"My God, it's Pete Bolduc! Look out!" almost yelled Levi, and "Halt! Surrender!" from Hersey, as two rifles were levelled at the oncomer. Then one instant's sight of a red and scarred face, a quick reach for a rifle, a splash of water, an overturned canoe, and with a curse the astonished half-breed dived into the undergrowth.

Two rifles spoke almost at the same instant from the waiting canoes, one answered from out the

thicket. A thrashing, struggling something in the filled canoe next caught all eyes, and Levi, leaping into the waist-deep stream, grasped and lifted a dripping form.

It was Chip!

A brief yet bloodless tragedy, all over in less time than the telling; yet a lifetime of horror had been endured by that waif, for as Levi bore her to the bank, cut the thongs that bound her, and freed her mouth from a pad of deerskin, she grasped his hand and kissed it.

And then came another surprise; for down a sloping, thick-grown hillside, something was heard thrashing, and soon Old Tomah, his clothing in shreds, his face bleeding, appeared to view.

Calculating to a nicety where he could best intercept and head off the escaping half-breed, he had crossed four miles of pathless undergrowth in less than an hour, and reached the stream at the nearest point after it left the lake.

How Chip, still sobbing from the awful agony of mind, and dripping water as well, greeted Old Tomah; how Hersey, chagrined at the escape of the half-breed, gave vent to muttered curses; how Martin joined them in thought; and how they all gathered around Chip and listened to her tale of

horror, are but minor features of the episode, and not worth the telling.

When all was said and done, Old Tomah, grim and silent as ever, although he had done what no white man could do or would try to do, washed his bloody face in the stream, drank his fill of the cool water, and lifting Pete's half-filled canoe as easily as if it were a shingle, tipped it, turned the water out, and set it on the sloping bank.

"Me take you back and watch you now," he said to Chip. "You no get caught again."

And thus convoyed, poor Chip, willing to clasp and caress the feet or legs of any or all of those men, and more grateful than any dog ever was for a caress, was escorted back to the lake.

All those waiting at the cabin were at the landing when the rescuers arrived. Angie, her eyes brimming, first embraced and then kissed the girl. Ray would have felt it a proud privilege to have carried her to the cabin, and Old Cy's wrinkled face showed more joy than ever gladdened it in all his life before.

Somehow this hapless waif had grown dearer to them all than she or they understood.

There was also feasting and rejoicing that night at Martin's wildwood home, and mingled with it all an oft-repeated tale.

Old Cy told one end of it in his droll way, Martin related the other, and Chip filled up the interim. Levi had his say, and Hersey supplied more or less — mostly more — of this half-breed's history.

Old Tomah, however, said nothing. To him, who lived in the past of a bygone race which looked upon lumbermen as devastating vandals ever eating into its kingdom, and whose thoughts were upon the happy hunting-grounds soon to be entered, this half-breed's lust and cunning were as the fall of the leaf. Were it needful he would, as he had, plunge through bramble and brier and leap over rock and chasm to rescue his big pappoose, but now that she was safe again, he lapsed into his stoical reserve once more. Shadowy forms and the mysticism of the wilderness were more to his taste than all the pathos of human life; and while his eyes kindled at Chip's smile, his thoughts were following some storm or tempest sweeping over a vast wilderness, or the rush and roar of the great white spectre.

"Chip is good girl," he said to Angie the next morning, "and white lady love her. Tomah's heart is like squaw heart, too; but he go away and forget. White lady must not forget," and with that mixture of tenderness and stoicism he strode away, and the last seen of him was when he entered

the outlet without once looking back at the cabin where his "big pappoose" was kept.

More serious, however, were the facts Martin and Hersey now had to consider, and a council of war, as it were, was now held with Levi, Old Cy, and the deputy as advisers.

What the half-breed would now do, and in what way they could now capture him were, of course, discussed, and as usual in such cases, it was of no avail, because they were dealing with absolutely unknown quantities. The facts were these: Bolduc, a cunning criminal, fearless of all law, had set his heart upon the possession of this girl. Her story, unquestionably true, that he had paid a large sum for this right and title, must inevitably make him feel that he would have what was his at any cost. His first attempt at securing her had been thwarted. He had been shot at by minions of the law, — an act sure to make him more vengeful, — his canoe had been taken, and what with the loss of the girl, money, and canoe also, one of his stamp would surely be driven to extreme revenge.

He was now at large in this wilderness, knew where the girl and his enemies were, and as Hersey said, "He had the drop on them."

"I believe in standing by our guns," that officer

continued, after all these conclusions had been admitted. "We are here to rid the woods of this scoundrel. We have five good rifles and know how to use them. The law is on our side, for he refused to surrender, and returned our shots; and if I catch sight of him, I shall shoot to cripple, anyway."

Old Cy's advice, however, was more pacific.

"My notion is this feller's a cowardly cuss," he said, "a sort o' human hyena. He'll never show himself in the open, but come prowlin' 'round nights, stealin' anything he can. He may take a pop at some on us from a-top o' the ridge; but I callate he'll never venture within gunshot daytimes. His sort is allus more skeered o' us'n we need be o' him."

In spite of Old Cy's conclusions, however, the camp remained in a state of siege that day and many days following.

Angie and Chip seldom strayed far from the cabin. Ray assumed the water-bringing, night and morning. Old Cy and Levi patrolled the premises, while Martin, Hersey, and his deputy hunted a little for game and a good deal for moccasined footprints or a sight or a sign of this half-breed.

Hersey, more especially, made him his object of pursuit. He had come here for that purpose, his pride and reputation were at stake, and the thousand dollars Martin had agreed to pay was a minor factor. He and his mate passed hours in the mornings and late in the afternoon watching from wide apart outlooks on the ridge. They made long jaunts up the brook valley to where the smoke sign had been seen, they found where this half-breed had built a fire here, and later another lair, a mile from the cabins and in this ridge. Long detours they made in other directions. Old Tomah's trail through the forest was crossed; but neither in forest nor on lake shore were any recent footprints of the half-breed found. Old ones were discovered in plenty. An almost beaten trail led from his lair in the ridge to a crevasse back of the cabins, but to one well versed in wood tracks, it was easy to tell how old these tracks were.

A freshly made trail in the forest bears unmistakable evidence of its date, and no woodwise man ever confounds a two or three days' old one with it. One footprint may not determine this occult fact; but followed to where the moss is spongy or the earth moist, a matter of hours, even, can be decided.

A week of this watchfulness, with no sign of their

enemy's return, not even to within the circuit patrolled time and again, began to relieve suspense and awaken curiosity. They had been so sure, especially Martin, that he would come back for revenge, that now it was hard to account for his not doing so.

"My idee is he got so skeered at them two shots," Old Cy asserted, "he hain't stopped runnin' yit." And then the old man chuckled at the ludicrous picture of this pernicious "varmint" scampering through a wilderness from fright.

But Old Cy was wrong. It was not fear that saved them from a prompt visitation from this half-breed, but lack of means of defence. The one shot remaining in his rifle at the moment of meeting had been sent on its vengeful errand, all the rest of his ammunition was in his canoe, and now on the bottom of the stream. Being thus crippled for means to act, the only course left to him was a return to his cabin seventy-five miles away, with only a hunting-knife to sustain life with.

Even to a skilled hunter and trapper like him, this was no easy task. It meant at least a week's journey through almost impassable swamps and undergrowth, with frogs, raw fish, roots, and berries for food.

How that half-breed, unconscious that the mills

of God had ground him the grist he deserved, fought his way through this pathless wilderness; how he ate mice and frogs to sustain his worthless life; how he cursed McGuire as the original cause of his wretched plight and Martin's party as aids; and how many times he swore he would kill every one of them, needs no description.

He lived to reach his hut on the Fox Hole, and from that moment on, this wilderness held an implacable enemy of McGuire's, sworn to kill him, first of all.

CHAPTER XIII

"The biggest fool is the man that thinks he knows it all."
— Old Cy Walker.

For two weeks the little party at Birch Camp first watched and then began to enjoy themselves once more. September had come, the first tint of autumn colored every patch of hardwood, a mellow haze softened the outline of each green-clad hill and mountain, the sun rose red and sailed an unclouded course each day, and gentle breezes rippled the lake. The forest, the sky, the air and earth, all seemed in harmonious mood, and the one discordant note, fear of this half-breed, slowly vanished.

Chip resumed her hour of study each day; a little fishing and hunting was indulged in by Martin and the two officers; wild ducks, partridges, deer, and trout supplied their table; each evening all gathered about the open fire in Martin's new cabin, and while the older people chatted, Ray took his banjo or whispered with Chip.

These two, quite unguessed by Angie, had become

almost lovers, and as it was understood Chip was to be taken to Greenvale, all that wonder-world, to her, had been described by Ray many times. He also outlined many little plans for sleigh-rides, skating on the mill-pond, and dances which he and she were to enjoy together.

His own future and livelihood were a little hazy to him. These matters do not impress a youth of eighteen; but of one thing he felt sure,— that Chip with her rosy face and black eyes, always tender to him, was to be his future companion in all pleasures. It was love among the spruce trees, a summer idyl made tender by the dangers interrupting it, and hidden from all eyes except Old Cy's, who was these young friends' favorite.

How many times he had taken these two over the ridge during the first two weeks, and picked berries while they played at it, or crossed the lake in his canoe to leave them on the shore while he cast for trout, no one but himself knew, and he wasn't telling.

Even now, with these two strangers about, Old Cy, Chip, and Ray somehow seemed to "flock by themselves." Old Cy took them canoeing. They paddled up streams entering the lake. He showed them where muskrats were house-building, where

mink had runways, and otter had sliding spots; and to forestall a plan of his own, he enlarged upon the fun and profit of trapping here when the time came. If these two young doves cooed a little meantime, he never heard it; if they held hands unduly long, he never saw it; and if they exchanged kisses behind his back — well, it was their own loss if they didn't.

But these days of mingled romance and tragic happenings, of shooting, fishing, story-telling, and wildwood life, were nearing their end, and one evening Martin announced that on the morrow they would pack their belongings and, escorted by the officers, leave the wilderness.

The next morning Old Cy took Ray aside.

"I want a good square talk with ye, my boy," he said, "an' I'm goin' to do ye a good turn if I kin. Now to begin, I s'pose ye know yer aunt's goin' to take Chip to Greenvale 'n' gin her a chance at the schoolin' she sartinly needs. Now you're callatin' to go 'long 'n' have a heap o' fun this winter. I'm goin' to stay here 'n' keer for Amzi. This is the situation 'bout as it is. Now you hev got yer eddication, 'n' the next move is to make yer way in the world 'n' arn suthin', an' ez a starter, I want ye to stay here this winter with me 'n' trap. The woods round here is jist bristlin' with spruce gum that is worth a dollar-

fifty a pound, easy. We've got two months now, 'fore snow gits deep. We kin live on the top shelf in the way o' fish 'n' game. We'll ketch a b'ar and pickle his meat 'n' smoke his hams, and when spring comes, I'll take ye out with mebbe five hundred dollars' worth of furs 'n' gum ez a beginnin'.

"Thar's also 'nother side to consider. Chip wants schoolin', 'n' she's got to study night 'n' day fer the next eight months. If you go back with 'em, an' go gallivantin' 'round with her, ez you're sure to, it won't be no help to her. I've given you two all the chances fer weavin' the threads o' 'fect-shun I could this summer, an' now let's you 'n' I turn to and make some money. I've asked your uncle 'n' aunt. They're willin', 'n' now, what do ye say?"

Few country boys with a love for trapping, such as Ray had, ever had a more alluring prospect spread before them. He knew Old Cy was right in all his conclusions, and almost without hesitation he agreed to the plan.

It was far-sighted wisdom on Old Cy's part, however, in not giving Ray time to reflect, else the magnet of Chip's eyes on the one hand, and eight months of separation on the other, would have proved too strong, and trap-setting and gum-gathering,

with five hundred dollars as reward, would have failed.

As it was, he came near weakening at the last moment when the canoes were packed and Angie and Chip came to take their seats in them.

He and his crude, rude, yet winsome little sweetheart had suffered a brief preliminary parting the evening previous. A good many sweet and silly nothings had been exchanged, also promises, and now the boy's heart was very sore.

Chip was more stoical. Her life at Tim's Place and contact with Old Tomah had taught her reserve, and yet when she turned for the last possible look at Old Cy and Ray, waving good-bye at the landing, a mist of tears hid them.

Old Cy's face was also a study. To him these parting clouds were as the white ones hiding the sun; yet he felt their chill. His own life shadow was lengthening. He had now but a brief renewal of youth in the lives of these two, and then forgetfulness, as he knew full well, and yet he pitied them.

More than that, he had set his hand to guiding the bark of their young lives into the safe harbor of a home, and all feelings of his own subserved to that.

"Come, come, my boy," he said to Ray as the two turned away, and he noted the lad's sad face.

"she's gone now, an' ye'd best ferget her fer a spell. Ye won't, I know, 'n' she won't; but ye'd best make believe ye do. This ain't no spot fer love-sick spells. We've got work to do, 'n' money to arn; ye've got the chance o' yer life now, an' me to help ye to it, so brace up 'n' look cheerful.

"Think o' what we got to do to git ready fer winter 'n' six foot o' snow. Think o' the traps we're goin' to set, an' the fun o' tendin' 'em. Why, girls ain't in it a minnit with ketchin' mink, marten, otter, an' now 'n' then a lynx or bobcat. Then when ye go back with a new suit 'n' money in yer pocket, ye'll feel prouder'n a peacock, 'n' Chip a-smilin' at ye sweeter'n new maple syrup."

Verily Old Cy had the wisdom of age and the cheerfulness of morning sunshine.

All that day these wilderness-marooned friends worked hard. An ample stock of birch wood must be cut and split, a shed of poles to cover it must be erected alongside of the cabin, the hermit's log hut was to be divested of its fittings, which were to be removed to the new cabin which all were now to occupy.

Realizing how vital to their existence the canoes were, Old Cy had also planned a shelter of small logs for them on one side of the log cabin, that could

be locked. Here the canoes not in use must be stored at once to guard against a night call from the malignant half-breed. His canoe had been taken along by Martin's party, to be left at Tim's Place, for even Hersey would have scorned to appropriate it.

There were dozens of other needs to prepare for during the next two months, all of which were important. An ample supply of deer meat must be secured, to be pickled and smoked. All the partridges they could shoot would be needed, and later, when south-bound ducks halted at the lake, a few of these would add to their larder.

In this connection, also, another need occurred to Old Cy. Trout could be caught all winter in the lake, but live bait must be had, and so a slat car to be sunk in some swift-running stream, which would hold them, must be constructed, also a scoop of mosquito net to catch them. These minnows were to be found now by the million in every brook, and forethought was Old Cy's watchword.

All these duties and details he discussed that first day with Ray, while they worked, for a purpose.

But the first evening here, with its open fire, yet empty seats, was the hardest to pass. In vain Old Cy enlarged upon the joys of trap-setting once more,

and how and where they were to secure gum. In vain he described how deadfalls were built and where they must be placed, how many signs of lynx and wildcat he had seen that summer, and how sure they were to secure some of these valuable furs.

Ray's heart was not here. Far away in some night camp, Chip was thinking of him. He knew each day would bear her farther away. No word of her safe arrival could reach them now. Long months must elapse ere he and she could meet again, and in prospect they seemed an eternity.

"Come, git yer banjo, my boy," Old Cy ejaculated at last, seeing Ray's face grow gloomy. "Tune 'er up, an' play us suthin' lively. None o' them goody-goody weepin' sort o' tunes; but give us 'Money Musk' 'n' a few jigs. I'm feelin' our prospects are so cheerful, I'd like to cut a few pigeon-wings out o' compliment."

But Old Cy's hilarity was nearly all put on. He, too, felt the effect of the empty seats and missed every one that had gone, and Ray's jig tunes lacked their spirit. He essayed a few, and then quite unconsciously his fingers strayed to "My Old Kentucky Home," and Old Cy's feelings responded.

CHAPTER XIV

"I jist nachly hate a person that talks as tho' he'd bin measured fer a harp." — OLD CY WALKER.

CHIP'S arrival in Greenvale produced astonishment and gossip galore. It began when the stage that "Uncle Joe" Barnes had driven for twenty years started for that village. There were other passengers besides Martin, his wife, and Chip. The seats inside were soon filled, and Chip, seeing a coveted chance, climbed nimbly to a position beside the driver.

"Gee Whittaker," observed one bystander to another, as Chip's black-stockinged legs flashed into view, "but that gal's nimbler'n a squirrel 'n' don't mind showin' underpinnin'. I wished I was drivin' that stage. I'll bet she's a circus."

Uncle Joe soon found her a live companion at least, for he had scarce left the village ere she began.

"Your hosses are fatter'n Tim's hosses used to be," she said. "Do ye feed 'em on hay and taters?"

Uncle Joe gave her a sideways glance.

"Hay and taters," he exclaimed; "we don't feed hosses on taters down here. Where'd you come from?"

"I used to live at Tim's Place, up in the woods, 'n' we fed our hosses on taters, 'n' they had backs sharp 'nuff to split ye."

This time Uncle Joe faced squarely around.

"I know all about hosses," she continued glibly, "I used to take keer on 'em 'n' ride one ploughin', an' I've been throwed more'n a hundred times when we struck roots, an' ye ought to 'a' heerd Tim cuss. I used to cuss just the same, but Mrs. Frisbie says I mustn't."

"Wal, I swow," ejaculated Uncle Joe, realizing that he had a "case." "What's your name, 'n' whar's Tim's Place?"

"My name's Chip, Chip McGuire, only 'tain't, it's Vera; but they allus called me Chip, an' Tim's Place is ever so far up in the woods. I runned away 'cause dad sold me, an' fetched up at Mrs. Frisbie's camp, 'n' she's goin' to eddicate me. My mother got killed when I was a kid, 'n' my dad killed 'nother one, too; he's a bad 'un."

Uncle Joe gasped at this gory tale of double murder, not being quite sure that the girl was sane.

"Hain't they ketched yer dad yit?" he queried.

"No, nor they won't," Chip rattled on, as if such killing were a daily occurrence in the woods. "He's a slick 'un, they say, an' now he's got Pete's money, he'll lay low."

"Worse and worse, and more of it," Uncle Joe thought.

"You must 'a' had middlin' lively times up in the woods," he said. "Did yer dad kill anybody else 'sides yer mother 'n' this man?"

"He didn't kill mother," Chip returned promptly; "he used to lick her, though, but she got killed in a mill, 'n' I wisht it 'ud bin him. I wouldn't 'a' bin an orfin then. Say," she added, as they entered a woods-bordered stretch of road, "did ye ever see spites here?"

"Spites," he responded, now more than ever in doubt as to her sanity, "what's them?"

"Why, they's just spites — things ye can't see much of 'ceptin' it's dark. Then they come crawlin' round. They's souls o' animals mostly, Old Tomah says. I've seen thousands on 'em."

Uncle Joe shifted his quid, turned and eyed the girl once more. First, a wild and wofully mixed tale of murder, and then spookish things! Beyond question she had wheels, and he resolved to humor her.

"Oh, yes, we see them things here now 'n' then," he said, "but it takes considerable licker to do it. We hain't had a murder, though, for quite a spell. This is a sorter peaceful neck o' woods ye're comin' to."

But Chip failed to grasp his quiet humor, and all through that twenty-mile autumn day stage ride she chattered on like a magpie.

He soon concluded she was sane enough, however, but the most voluble talker who ever shared his seat.

"I never seen the beat o' her," he said that night at Phinney's store, — the village news agency, — "she clacked every minit from the time we started till we fetched in, an' I never callated sich goin's on ez she told about cud ever happen. Thar was murder 'n' runnin' away, 'n' she got ketched 'n' carried off 'n' fetched back, 'n' a whole lot o' resky business. She believes in ghosts, too, sorter Injun sperits, 'n' she kin swear jist ez easy ez I kin. It seems the Frisbies hev kinder 'dopted her, 'n' I guess they'll hev their hands full. She's a bright 'un, though, but sich a talker!"

At Aunt Comfort's spacious, old-fashioned home, where Chip was now installed, she soon began to create the same impression. This had

been Angie's former home, and her Aunt Comfort Day had been her foster-mother.

This family, in addition to the new arrival, consisted of Aunt Comfort, rotund and warm-hearted; Hannah Pettibone, a well-along spinster of angular form and temper, thin to an almost painful degree, with a well-defined mustache; and a general helper on the farm, and a chore boy about Chip's age named Nezer, completed the list.

Once included in this somewhat diverse group, Chip became an immediate bone of contention.

Aunt Comfort, of course, opened her heart to her at once; but Hannah closed hers, almost from the first day, and in addition she began to nurse malice as well. There was some reason for this, mainly due to Chip's startling freshness of speech.

"I thought ye must be a man wearin' wimmin's clothes, the first time I see ye," she said to Hannah the next day after her arrival, and without meaning offence. "It was all on account o' yer little whiskers, I guess. I never see a woman with 'em afore. Why don't ye shave?"

This was enough; for if there was any one thing more mortifying than all else to Hannah, it was her facial blemish, and a mention of it she considered an intentional insult.

From this moment onward she hated Chip.

Nezer, however, took to her as a duck to water, and her story, which he soon heard, became a real dime novel to him, and not content with one telling, he insisted on repetition. This was also unfortunate for — blessed with a vivid imagination and sure to enlarge upon all facts — he soon spread the story with many blood-curdling additions.

These stories, with Uncle Joe's corroboration, resulted in a direful tale believed by all. Neighbors flocked in to see this heroine of many escapades, villagers halted in front of Aunt Comfort's to catch a sight of this marvel, and so the wonder spread.

Angie was, of course, to blame. More impressed with the seriousness of the task she had undertaken than the need of caution, she had failed to tell Chip she must not talk about herself, and so a wofully distorted history became current gossip.

When Sunday came, the village church was packed, and Parson Jones marvelled much at the unexpected increase of religious interest. He had heard of this new arrival, but when the Frisbie family with Chip, in suitable clothing, entered their pew, the cynosure of all eyes, this unusual attendance was accounted for.

And what a staring-at Chip received!

On the church steps a group of both young and old men had awaited her arrival and gazed at her in open-eyed astonishment. All through service she was watched, and not content with this, a dozen or so, men and women, formed a double line outside, awaiting the Frisbies' exit.

Angie also failed to understand the principal cause of this interest. Her last appearance at this church had been as a bride. Naturally that fact would produce some staring, and so the curious and almost rude scrutiny the family received, was less noticed by her.

But Chip's eyes were observant.

"I don't like goin' to meetin'," she said, "an' bein' stared at like I was a wildcat. I seen 'em grinnin', too, some on 'em, when we went in, an' one feller winked to another. What ailed 'em?"

Her vexations, however, had only just begun, for Angie had seen and made arrangements with Miss Phinney, one of the village school-teachers, and the next morning Chip was sent to school. And now real trouble commenced.

Not knowing more than how to read and spell short words, and unable to write, she, a fairly well-

developed young lady, presented a problem which was hard for a teacher to solve. To put her in the class where she belonged was absurd. She must sit with older girls, or look ridiculous. If she recited with the eight-year-old children, the result would be the same, and so a species of private tuition with recitations at noon or after school became the only possible course and the one her teacher adopted.

This also carried its vexations, for Chip was as tall as Miss Phinney and a little larger. Not one of that band of pupils was over twelve. To join in their games was no sport for Chip, while they, having heard about her thrilling experiences, with a hint that she wasn't quite right in her head, felt afraid of her.

"I feel so sorry for her," Miss Phinney explained to Angie, a week later, "and yet, I don't know what to do. She is so big the children won't play with her, or she with them. I am the only one with whom she will talk, and she seems so humble and so grateful for every word. I can't be as stern with her or govern her as I should, on account of her temper and size.

"Only yesterday I heard screaming at recess, and going out, I found that Chip had one of the

girls by the hair and was cuffing her. It transpired that this girl had called her an Indian and asked if she had ever scalped anybody. I can't punish such a pupil, and I can't help loving her, so you see she is a sore trial."

She also became a trial to Angie in countless ways.

Of a deep religious conviction, and believing this waif needed to be brought into the fold, Angie set about that task at once. But Chip was impervious to such instruction. By no argument or persuasion could Angie force her protégée to renounce her belief in the heathenism of Old Tomah, or convince her that God and the angels were any different from his collection of spirit forms, or that heaven was anything more than another name for his happy hunting-grounds. Old Tomah had been her wise and only friend, so far. She had seen all the ghostly forms he had described, had felt all the occult influences which he said existed, and neither coaxing nor derision served to make her disown them.

Of course, Angie took her to church regularly. She sat through services and bowed as all did. Sabbath-school instruction would have been forced upon her but for the reason that made her a class

of one under Miss Phinney, and Parson Jones's attention was finally enlisted.

He spent an hour in pointing out her heathenish sins, assured her that Old Tomah was a wicked reprobate and an ignorant savage combined, that all influences so far surrounding her had been the worst possible, — a self-evident fact, — and unless she confessed a change of heart, and soon, too, all her friends here would desert her and the devil would overtake her by and by, and then closed this well-intended effort with a prayer.

Chip sat through it all, mute and cowering. The parson's white hair, sharp eyes, and solemn voice awed her, and when he had departed, she began to cry.

"I don't see the need o' makin' me say I don't believe suthin' when I do," she said. "I've seen spites 'n' I know I've seen 'em, an' nobody can make me believe Old Tomah a bad man, if he is an Injun. He runned after me when I got ketched, 'n' near got his eyes scratched out" — a logic it was useless to contend with.

"You're jest a little spunky devil," Hannah said to her later on with a vicious accent, "an' if I was Mrs. Frisbie I'd larrup ye till ye confessed penitence, I would. The idee o' you settin' thar

a-mullin' all the time the minister was tryin' to save ye! It's scand'lus!"

And that night Chip was back in the wilderness with Old Cy and Ray in thought, and so homesick for them that she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XV

"While yer argufyin' with a fool, jes' figger thar's two on 'em." — OLD CY WALKER.

THE streams and swamps contiguous to this lake were well adapted for the habitat of mink, muskrat, otter, fisher, and those large fur-bearing animals, the lynx and lucivee, and here a brief description of where such animals exist, and how they are caught, may be of interest.

The habits of the muskrat, the least cunning of these, are so well known that they merit only a few words. They are amphibious animals, their food is succulent roots, bulbs, and bark, and they frequent small, marshy ponds, sluggish streams, and swamps. In summer they conceal themselves by burrowing into soft banks; in winter they erect houses of sedge-grass, roots, and mud, and are caught in small steel traps set in shallow water at the entrance of their paths out of lake or stream.

Mink, marten, otter, and fisher are much alike in shape and habit. All belong to the same family, but vary in size, also slightly in the matter of food.

Mink and marten live on fish, frogs, birds, mice, etc.; otter on fish and roots; and fishers, as their name implies, subsist largely on fish. All these are more valuable fur-bearing animals than muskrats. Their abiding places are swamps and shallow streams, in the banks of which they burrow, and they are usually caught in steel traps baited with fish or meat.

The lucivee, or lynx, and bobcat, more ferocious and cunning than their smaller cousins, roam the woods and swamps, live on smaller animals, hide in caves, crevices, and hollow trees, and they as well as otter occasionally are caught in deadfalls.

Old Cy, familiar as he was with the homes, habits, and the manner of catching these cunning animals, soon began his trap-setting campaign. A few dozen steel traps were first set along the stream and lagoons entering the lake, and then he and Ray pushed up Beaver Brook, and leaving their canoe, followed its narrow valley in search of suitable spots to set the more elaborated deadfalls, which also merit description.

A deadfall is made by placing one end of a suitably sized log — one perhaps fifteen feet long and a foot in diameter — on a figure four trap, so adjusted that its spindle end, to which the bait is secured, shall be poised beneath the upraised end of the log.

Alongside of this log a double row of stakes is driven to form a pen with entrance leading to the bait. When this deadly contrivance is properly adjusted, the log and its pen of stakes is concealed with green boughs piled lightly over it, and all the hungry lynx sees is a narrow opening under green boughs, and in it a tempting morsel awaiting him. As those creatures, as well as now and then an otter, are sure to roam up and down all small streams, a spot where one emerges from a narrow defile, or joins a larger one, is usually selected for a deadfall.

It is also quite a task to clear a suitable space, fell a right-sized tree, and construct one of these penlike traps; and although Old Cy and Ray started early, it was mid-afternoon that day ere they had the third one ready and awaiting its possible victim.

As gum-gathering was also a part of their season's plan, they now left the swamp valley, and, ascending the spruce-clad upland, began this work, which is also worthy of description.

The chewing gum of commerce, so delightful to schoolgirls and small boys, is the refined, diluted, and sweetened product of gum nuts, or the small excrescences of spruce sap that exudes and hardens around knot-holes and cracks in the bark of those

trees. These form into hardened nuts or knobs of gum, from the size of a hazelnut to that of butternut, and are worth from a dollar to a dollar and fifty cents a pound. A long pole with a sharpened knife or chisel fastened to its tip is used by gum seekers. It can be gathered from the time frost first hardens it until spring, and to gather three to five pounds is considered a good day's work.

Ray's first attempt at this labor seemed like nut-gathering at home, only more romantic, and when they were well into the vast spruce growth bordering one side of the Beaver Brook valley, he became so interested in hunting for the brown knobs, loosening them, and picking them up that he would have soon lost all points of the compass, except for Old Cy.

There is also a spice of danger seasoning this pursuit. A wildcat might at any moment be seen watching from the crotch of a tree, or a bear might suddenly emerge from the thicket. It was hard work also, for while some parts of a spruce forest may be free from undergrowth, not all portions are, and this tangle is one not easy to move about in.

There was also another element that entered into the trapping and gum-gathering life, — the possible return of the half-breed.

"He hain't nothin' agin us," Old Cy asserted, when the question came up. "We didn't chase him the day he stole Chip, 'n' yet I s'pose he'll show up some day, 'n' mebbe do us harm."

It was this fear that had led Old Cy to leave one of their canoes in a log locker, securely barred, and also to caution the hermit to remain on guard at the cabin while he and Ray were away.

A canoe is the one most vital need of a wildwood life, for the reason that the streams are the only avenues of escape and afford the only opportunities for travel.

The wilderness, of course, can be traversed, but not easily. Swamps will be met and must be avoided, for a wilderness swamp is practically impassable. Streams can be forded, but lakes must be encompassed, and even an upland forest is but a tangled jungle of fallen trees and undergrowth.

Old Cy knew, or at least he felt almost sure, that the half-breed would return in good time. He had also reasoned out his failure to do so at once, and knew that left canoeless, as he had been that tragic day, his only course must be the one he actually followed. A month had elapsed since then, with no sign of this "varmint's" return, and now Old Cy was on the watch for it.

Each morning, when he traversed the lake shore from ice-house to landing, he looked for tell-tale foot-prints. He watched for them wherever he went, and the distant report of a rifle would have been accepted as a sure harbinger of this enemy.

It became their custom now each day, first to visit all small traps in the near-by streams, then pushing their canoe as far as possible up the Beaver Brook, to leave it, continue up the valley, and after inspecting their deadfalls, turn to the right out of this swale, and begin the gathering of gum.

And now, one day, in carrying out this programme, a discovery was made.

They had first visited the small traps near the lake, securing a couple of mink and three muskrats, which were left in the canoe. An otter was found in one of the deadfalls, and taking this with them, they entered the spruce timber and hung it on a conspicuous limb. Then the search for gum began.

As usual, they worked hard. The days were short, the best of sunlight was needful to see the brown nuts in the sombre forest, and so they paid no heed to aught except what was overhead. When time to return arrived, Old Cy picked up his rifle and led the way back to where the otter had been left, but it had vanished. Glancing about to make

sure that he was right, he advanced to the tree, looked down, and saw two footprints. Stooping over to examine them better in the uncertain light, he noted also that they were not his own, but larger, and made by some one wearing boots.

"Tain't the half-breed," he muttered, with an accent of relief, and looking about, he saw a well-defined trail leading down the slope and thence onward toward the swamp.

Some one had crossed this broad, oval, spruce-covered upland while they were not two hundred rods away from this tree, had stolen their otter, and gone on into the swamp.

Any freshly made human footprint found in a vast wilderness awakens curiosity; these seemed ominous.

"He must 'a' seen us 'fore he did the otter," Old Cy ejaculated, "an' it's curis he didn't make himself known. Neighbors ain't over plenty, hereabout."

But the sun was nearing the tree-tops, the canoe was a mile away, and after one more look around, Old Cy started for it. There was no use in following this trail now, for it led into the tangled swamp, and so, skirting this until a point opposite the canoe was reached, Old Cy and Ray then plunged into it.

Twilight had begun to shadow this vale ere the

canoe was reached. And here was another surprise, for the canoe was found turned half over, and on its broad oval bottom was a curious outline of black mud. The light was not good here. A fir-grown ledge shadowed the spot; but as Old Cy stooped to examine this mud-made emblem, it gradually took shape, and he saw — a skull and cross bones!

"Wal, by the Great Horn Spoon!" he exclaimed, "I never s'posed a pirate 'ud fetch in here! An' he's swiped our muskrats and mink," he added, as he looked under the canoe, "durn him!"

Then the bold bravado of it all occurred to Old Cy. The theft was doubtless made by whosoever had taken their otter, and not content with robbing them, he had added insult.

"I s'pose we'd orter be grateful he left the paddles 'n' didn't smash the canoe," Old Cy continued, turning it over. "I wonder who't can be?"

One hasty look around revealed the same boot-marks in the soft earth near the stream, and then he and Ray launched their craft and started for home.

"I'm goin' to foller them tracks to-morrer," Old Cy said, when they were entering the lake and a light in the cabin just across reassured him. "It may be a little resky, but I'm goin' to find out what sorter a neighbor we've got."

CHAPTER XVI

"When a man begins talkin' 'bout himself, it seems as tho' he'd never run down." — OLD CY WALKER.

ALL fellow-sojourners in the wilderness awaken keen interest, and the unbroken silence and solitude of a boundless forest make a fellow human being one we are glad to accost.

A party of lumbermen wielding axes causes one to turn aside and call on them. A sportsman's camp seen on a lake shore or near a stream's bank always invites a landing to interview whoever may be there.

All this interest was now felt by Old Cy and Ray, and with it an added sense of danger. No friendly hunter or trapper would thus ignore them in the woods. This piratically minded thief must have seen them, for the spruce-clad oval, perhaps half a mile in width, was comparatively free from undergrowth where they had been working. He had crossed it within fairly open sight of them, had found the otter hanging from a limb, had taken it, and thence on to rob their canoe, daub it with that hideous emblem, world-wide in meaning, and then had

gone on his way. Almost could Old Cy see him watching them from behind trees, skulking along when their backs were turned, a low, contemptible thief.

Old Cy knew that bordering this oval ridge on its farther side was a swamp, that a stream flowed through it, and surmising that this fellow might have come up or down this stream, he left their cabin prepared for a two or three days' sojourn away from it, which meant that food, blankets, and simple cooking utensils must be taken along.

No halt was made to visit traps. Old Cy was trailing bigger game now; and when the point where they had left the canoe the day previous was reached, the canoe was pulled out on the stream's bank, the rifles only taken, and the trailing began. He followed up the brook valley a little way, to find that only one track came down; he then circled about the canoe, until, like a hound, he found where the clearly defined trail left the swamp again.

Here in the soft carpet under the spruce trees one could follow this trail on the run, and here also Old Cy found where this enemy had halted beside trees evidently while watching them, as the tracks indicated. When the bordering swamp was reached, the trail turned in a westerly direction, skirting thus

for half a mile, and here, also, evidences of skulking along were visible.

Another trail was now come upon, but leading directly over the ridge, and just beyond this juncture both the trails now joined, entered the swamp, and ended at a lagoon opening out from the stream. Here, also, evidences of a canoe having been hauled up into the bog were visible.

"That sneakin' pirate come up this stream," Old Cy observed to Ray, as the two stood looking at these unmistakable signs. "He left his canoe here 'n' crossed the ridge above us 'n' down to whar we left the otter 'n' on to our canoe. Then he come back the way we follered, 'n' my idee is he had his eye on us most o' the time. I callate he has been laughin' ever since at what we'd say when we found that mud daub on our canoe, durn him!"

But their canoe was now a half-mile away, and for a little time Old Cy looked at the black, current-less stream and considered. Then he glanced up at the sun.

"I've a notion we'd best fetch our canoe over here," he said at last, "an' follow this thief a spell farther. We may come on to suthin'."

"Won't he shoot at us?" returned Ray, more impressed by this possible danger than was Old Cy.

"Wal, mebbe and mebbe not," answered the old man. "Shootin's a game two kin play at, an' we've jist ez good a right to foller the stream ez he has."

But when their canoe had been carried over and launched in this lagoon, Ray's spirits rose. It was an expedition into new waters, somewhat venturesome, and for that reason it appealed to him.

Then they had two rifles, Old Cy had taught him to shoot, he had already killed one deer and some smaller game, and the go-west-and-kill-Indian impulse latent in all boys was a part of Ray's nature. Besides, he had an unbounded faith in Old Cy's skill with the rifle.

And now began a canoe journey into and through a vast swamp, the upland border of which could scarce be seen. The stream they followed was black, and so absolutely motionless that it was a guess which way they were going. The mingled hackmatack and alder growth along each bank was so dense that no view ahead could be seen, and they must merely follow the winding pathway of dark waters and hope to come out somewhere.

For two hours they paddled along this serpentine highway, and then the vastness of this morass began to impress them. No sign of current had been met.

All view of the spruce-grown upland they had left was obscured by distance. Now and then a dead tree, bleached and spectral, marked a turn in the stream, and hundreds of them, rising all about above the low green tangle, added a ghostly haze. It was as if they were venturing into a new world — a boundless morass, covered by an impenetrable tangle, and made grewsome by the bleaching trunks of dead trees.

"I'm goin' to find which way we're goin'," Old Cy exclaimed at last, as they neared a small dead cedar that pointed out over the stream, and seizing a projecting limb of this, he broke off bits of dry twigs, and tossed them into the stream. For a long moment not one stirred, and then at last a movement backward could be discovered.

"We're goin' up-stream, anyhow," he added, glancing at the sun, now marking mid-afternoon; "but we've got to git out o' this 'fore dark, or we'll be in a bad fix, an' hev to sleep in the canoe."

No halt for dinner had yet been made. They were both faint from need of food, and so Old Cy reached for a small wooden pail containing their sole supply of provisions. Neither was it a luxurious repast which was now eaten. A couple of hard-tacks munched by each and moistened with a cup

of this swamp water and a bit of dried deer meat was all, and then Old Cy lit his pipe, dipped his paddle handle in the stream, and once more they pushed on. Soon a low mound of hard soil rose out of the tangle just ahead, an oasis in this unvarying mud swamp, and gaping at them from amid its cover of scrub birch and cedar stood a deadfall. It faced them as they neared this small island, and with log upraised between a pen of stakes it much resembled the open mouth of a huge alligator.

"Hain't been built long," Old Cy exclaimed, after they had landed to examine it. "I've a notion it's the doin's of our pirate friend, an' he's trappin' round about this swamp. He's had good luck lately, anyhow, for he's got six o' our pelts to add to his string."

From here onward signs of human presence in this swamp became more visible. Now and then an opening cut through the limbs of a lopped-over spruce was met; a spot where drift had been pushed aside to clear the stream was found at one place; signs of a canoe having been nosed into the bog grass were seen; and here were also the same foot-prints they had followed.

Another bit of hard bottom was reached, and here again was another deadfall. Tracks evidently made

within a few days were about here, and tied to its figure-four spindle was a freshly caught brook sucker.

"The scent's gettin' warm," Old Cy muttered, as he examined these signs of a trapper's presence, and then, mindful of the sun, he paddled on again.

And now an upland growth of tall spruce was seen ahead, the banks became in evidence, and a slight current was met. One more long bend in the stream was followed, then came curving banks and large-bodied spruce. They were out of the swamp.

Soon a more distinctive current opposed them, a low murmur of running water came from ahead, and then a pass between two abutting ledges was entered. Here the stream eddied over sunken rocks, and pushing on, the forest seemed suddenly to vanish as they emerged from the gloom of this short cañon, and the next moment they caught sight of a long, narrow lakelet.

The sun, now almost to the tree-tops, cast a reddish glow upon its placid surface, and so welcome a change was it from the ghostly, forbidding swamp just left, that Old Cy halted their canoe at once to look out upon it. It was seemingly a mile long, but quite a narrow lake. A bold, rocky shore rising in ledges faced them just across, and extended along

that side, back of these a low, green-clad mountain, to the right, and at the end of this lanelike lake a bolder, bare-topped cliff was outlined clear and distinct.

This strip of water, for it was not much more, seemingly filled an oblong gorge in these mountains, only one break in them, to the left of this bare peak; and as Old Cy urged their canoe out of the alder-choked stream, now currentless once more, a margin line of rushes and reeds was seen to form that shore. Back of these, also, rose the low ledge they had passed.

"Looks like a good hidin' spot fer a pirate," he exclaimed, glancing up and down the smiling lakelet. "Thar ain't many folks likely to tackle that swamp — it took us 'most all day to cross it. I'll bet no lumberman ever tried it twice, 'n' if I wanted to git absolutely 'way from bein' molested, I'd locate here. I dunno whether we'd best cross 'n' make camp 'mong them ledges, or go back into the woods. Guess we'd best go back 'n' take a sneak round behind the ledge. I noticed a loggin [1] leadin' up that way 'fore we left the swamp."

But now something was discovered that proved Old Cy's wisdom, for as they, charmed somewhat by

[1] Lagoon.

the spot, yet feeling it forbidding, still glanced up and down the bold shore just across, suddenly a thin column of smoke rose from away to the right, amid the bare ledges.

First a faint haze, rising in the still air, then a burst of white, until the fleecy pillar was plainly outlined as it ascended and drifted backward into the green forest.

CHAPTER XVII

"Licker allus lets the cat out." — Old Cy Walker.

When the half-breed, Pete Bolduc, reached Tim's Place, he was more dead than alive. A week of crawling through swamps, wading or swimming streams, sleeping under fallen trees, while sustaining life on frogs, raw fish, and one muskrat, had eliminated about all desire to obtain Chip, and left a murderous hate instead. And McGuire was its object.

Pete reasoned that he had bought the girl and paid for her. Her father, never intending to keep faith, had connived at her escape, and knowing of these campers, had hired her for a serving maid, and they would inevitably take her out when they left. It was all a part of McGuire's plot and plan, and no doubt this stranger had also paid him for her possession.

Two other facts also seemed proof positive that these conclusions were correct. First, McGuire had never been seen at Tim's Place since the girl's escape; second, it would have been impossible for her to reach these campers without aid. But she

was lost to him for all time, as Pete now realized. The stern faces and ready rifles of her protectors had convinced him of that, and all that remained was to find McGuire, force him to give back the money, then obtain revenge.

Neither was this an easy task, for McGuire was a dangerous man, as Pete well knew, and the more he considered the matter, sojourning at Tim's Place and nursing his hate meanwhile, the more he realized that the killing of McGuire must precede the obtaining of his money. And now, where to find McGuire became a question.

Pete knew that at this season he usually devoted a month or more to a trapping trip, that in starting out he always ascended the Fox Hole, and that his location for this purpose was the head waters of another stream, reached by a carry from the Fox Hole.

For a week Pete remained at Tim's Place, and then, obtaining a canoe, returned to his hut on this stream.

And now, in the seclusion of his own domicile, certain other facts and conclusions bearing upon the present whereabouts of McGuire occurred to him.

For many years they had been friends in a way, or at least as much so as two such scamps ever are.

Together they had made many canoe trips to the Provinces to obtain liquor. In these expeditions, McGuire had furnished the means; but outlawed as he was, had remained in hiding while Pete transacted the business and later shared the profits. Pete's hut had also been used as headquarters, and near by it the smuggled liquor had been secreted.

On rare occasions, also, McGuire had broken away from his usual abstemiousness, and here, with Pete for companion, had indulged in an orgie. At these times he invariably boasted how cunning he had been in eluding all hated officers of the law, how much money he was worth, and how securely he had it hidden. The one most pertinent fact, the location of this hiding spot, he never betrayed. But now Pete — almost as shrewd as he — reasoned that it would most likely be somewhere in this region annually visited by him.

To find this was a hard problem; to find McGuire's hiding spot for his money more so. It meant trailing a human being of greater cunning than any animal that roamed this wilderness; and yet with the double incentive of robbing and revenge now decided upon by this half-breed, he set about solving it.

A day's journey up the Fox Hole brought him to

the carry over into another stream, and here a probably month-old trail, crossing and recrossing it, was found. Whoever left the tell-tale footprints wore boots, and as McGuire was the only hunter or trapper in this region known to wear them, this seemed evidence that it was he. Then as two trails led over, with only one returning, that proved he had made two trips across to carry his canoe and belongings and had not returned. This was plain enough, but when once over, the question of whether he went up or down stream was another matter. It was an even chance, however, and Pete decided to go up, and keep sharp watch for any signs which would indicate that he was on the right track. To trail any animal in this wilderness was child's play to Pete; but to follow another trapper journeying by canoe was not so easy. Halts for night camps he must of course make, collections of drift in some narrow part of the stream he would inevitably disturb, and where a carry around a rapid came, a trail would be left. These were the only signs possible to discover, and for these Pete now watched.

The slow-running waterway he ascended the first day wound through a stately forest of spruce. Its banks were low and well defined, yet always covered by undergrowth. No breaks in them, no openings

where a night halt would naturally be made; but ever of the same unvarying character, and shadowed by the overhang of interlaced boughs. With one eye keen to any even the slightest signs of human progress up this stream, and ears ever alert, Pete paddled on. Wildwood sights and sounds, however, were met in plenty. Once a lordly moose, seeing or smelling him, snorted and plunged away, crashing through the undergrowth. Deer were seen or heard at every turn of the stream, and dozens of musk-rats were noticed swimming or diving off the bank, with now and then an otter or a mink, to vary this monotony.

But these were of no interest to Pete. He was trailing other game, and like an avenging Nemesis, slowly crept through this vast, sombre, and forbidding forest. When nightfall neared, he hauled his canoe out where a stretch of hard bank favored, and camped for the night, and when daylight came again, he pushed on. For three days this watchful, up-stream journey was continued, and then a range of low mountains began to close in, short rapids needing the use of a setting-pole were met, and at last a series of stair-like falls was sighted ahead. The sun was well down when these were reached. How long the necessary carry might be, he could not

tell, and hauling out below the rapids, Pete took his rifle and crept up along the bank. So far not a sign indicating whether or not McGuire had gone up this stream had been found, but here, if anywhere, they must be met, and Pete watched eagerly for them.

Every rock where a human foot might scrape away the moss was scanned. Each bending bough and bush was observed, and when, perforce, he had to leave the rock-lined bank and make a detour, he still watched for signs.

At the top of this long pitch, the tall trees also ended, and here the stream issued from a vast bush-grown swamp devoid of timber. A few dead trees rose from it, and climbing a low spruce, Pete saw this whitened expanse of spectral cones extended for miles. It was a forbidding prospect. The stream's course appeared visible only a few rods. It seemed hardly probable the man he was trailing would cross this swamp. No signs of his ascending this waterway had so far been met, and Pete, now discouraged, was about to return to his canoe and on the morn go back, when, glancing across the stream, he saw a tiny opening in the bushes, as if they had been pushed aside.

To cross, leaping from rock to rock in the rapids below, was his next move, and returning to where

the fall began, there, just back from this point, and beside a ledge, were the charred embers of a camp-fire.

Weeks old, without doubt, for rain had fallen on them, and all about were the footprints of some one wearing boots.

CHAPTER XVIII

"'Tain't allus the bell cow that gives the most milk."
—Old Cy Walker.

Old Cy was, above all, a peaceable man, and while curiosity had led him to follow the trail of this robber and to cross this vast swamp, now that he saw the suggestive smoke sign, he hesitated about venturing nearer.

"I guess we'd best be keerful," he whispered to Ray, "or we may wish we had been. I callate our pirate friend's got a hidin' spot over thar, 'n' most likely don't want callers. He may be only a queer old trapper a little short o' scruples ag'in' takin' what he finds, 'n' then ag'in he may be worse'n that. His campin' spot's ag'in' him, anyhow."

But the sun was now very low; a camp site must soon be found, and scarce two minutes from the time he saw this rising column of smoke, Old Cy dipped his paddle and slowly drew back into the protecting forest. Once well out of sight, the canoe was turned and they sped back down-stream and into the swamp once more. Here he turned aside into a lagoon they

had passed, and at its head they pulled their canoe out into the bog.

The two gathered up their belongings, and picking their way out of the morass, reached the belt of hard bottom skirting the ridge. They were now out of sight from the lake, but still too near the stream to risk a camp-fire, and so Old Cy led the way along this belt until a more secluded niche in the ridge was reached, and here they began camp-making. It was a simple process. A level spot was cleared from brush, two convenient saplings denuded of their lower limbs, a cross pole was placed in suitable crotches, near-by spruces were attacked with the axe, and a bark wigwam soon resulted, and just as the darkness began to gather, a fire was started.

Both Old Cy and Ray had worked with a will, and none too soon was so much accomplished, for night was upon them, and only by the firelight could they see to complete the needful preparations.

A peculiar effect of the time, place, and their position was also noticeable; for although at least a mile away from where this smoke sign had warned them, and screened from it by a high ridge, both spoke only in whispers. More than that, the camp-fire was kept low, barely enough to cook a modest meal, and when the flame chanced to flare up, Old

Cy glanced aloft into the tree-tops to see if they were illumed. Not much was said, for Old Cy's thoughts were far away, and when supper was eaten he lit his pipe and sat watching the embers while Ray studied him. Ray, too, spoke scarcely a word. All that day he had felt much the same, and while he had the most implicit confidence in Old Cy's wisdom, now that he had advised retreat, the reasons for it became ten times more ominous to Ray.

Then again, the sombre nook in which they had camped and the vast swamp that lay between them and the protecting cabin, all had an effect. This weird feeling was also added to by the occasional cry of some night prowler far away in the forest or out in the swamp. Chip's spites, those uncanny creatures of the imagination, also began to gather, and Ray fancied he could hear them crawling cautiously about.

"I don't like this," he whispered at last, "and I wish we hadn't come. Don't you think we had better go back soon as it's daylight?"

"Wal, mebbe," answered Old Cy, smiling at Ray's nervousness. "I've kinder figgered we might watch out from a-top o' the ridge when mornin' came 'n' see what we kin see. We might ketch sight o' the pirate chap 'cross the lake."

"But suppose he catches sight of us," returned Ray, "what then?"

"I don't mean he shall," answered Old Cy, "so don't git skeered. I'll take keer on ye."

That night, however, was the longest ever passed by Ray, for not until near morning did he fall into a fitful slumber, and scarcely had he lost himself before Old Cy was up and watching for the dawn.

Its first faint glow was visible when Ray's eyes opened, and without waiting for fire or breakfast, they started for the top of the ridge. From here a curious sight met their eyes, for the lake and also the ridges out of which the smoke had risen were hidden beneath a white pall of fog. Back of them also, and completely coating the immense swamp, was the same sea of vapor. It soon vanished with the rising sun, and just as the ledges across the lake outlined themselves, once more that smoke sign rose aloft.

And now the two watchers could better see whence it came. Old Cy had expected to obtain sight of some hut or bark shack nestling among these rocks; but none was visible. Instead, the smoke rose out of a jagged rock, and there was not a cabin roof or sign of one anywhere.

"That feller's in a cave," he whispered to Ray, "an' the smoke's comin' out o' a crack, sure's a gun!"

It seemed so, and for a half-hour the two watched it in silent amazement.

Then came another surprise, for suddenly Old Cy caught sight of a man just emerging from behind a rock fully ten rods from the rising smoke; he stooped, lifted a canoe into view, advanced to the shore, slid it halfway into the water, returned to the rock, picked up a rifle, then pushed the canoe off, and, crossing the lake, vanished into the outlet.

The two watchers on the ridge exchanged glances.

"He's goin' to tend his traps, an' mebbe ourn," Old Cy said at last, and then led the way back to their bark shack. Here he halted, and placing one hand scoop-fashion over his ear, listened intently until he caught the faint sound of a paddle touching a canoe gunwale. First slightly, then a more distinctive thud, and then less and less until the sound ceased.

"The coast's clear," he added, now in an exultant whisper, "an' while the old cat's away we'll take a peek at his den."

A hurried gathering of their few belongings was made, the canoe was shoved into the lagoon, and no time was lost until the lake was crossed and they drew

alongside of where the smoke was still rising in a thin film. No landing was possible here, for the shore was a sheer face of upright slate, and only where this lone trapper had launched his canoe could they make one.

From here a series of outcropping slate ledges rose one above another, and between them and parallel to the shore, narrow, irregular passages partially closed by broken rock. It was all of slaty formation, jagged, serrated, and gray with moss.

Following one of these passages, Old Cy and Ray came to the ledge out of which the smoke was rising from a crevasse. It was a little lower than one in front, perhaps forty feet in breadth, double that in length, and of a more even surface. At each end was a short transverse passage hardly wide enough to walk in, and a few feet deep.

And now, after a more careful examination of the crevasse out of which the thin film of smoke rose, Old Cy began a search. Up and down each narrow passway he peeped and peered, but nowhere was a crack or cranny to be found in their walls. In places they were as high as his head, sheer faces of slate, then broken, serrated, moss-coated, or of yellow, rusty color. Here and there a stunted spruce had taken root in some crack, and over,

back from the topmost ledge, this green enclosure began and continued up the low mountain. Here, also, in a sunny nook below this belting tangle of scrub spruce, were ample signs of a trapper's occupation in the way of pelts stretched upon forked sticks and hanging from a cord crossing this niche. They were of the usual species found in this wilderness, — a dozen muskrat, with a few mink and otter skins and one lynx.

Another sign of human presence was also noted, for here a log showing axe-marks, with split wood and chips all about, was seen.

"Some o' them pelts is ourn," Old Cy ejaculated, glancing at the array, "an' I've a notion we'd best hook on to 'em. Mebbe not, though," he added a moment later, "it might git us into more trouble."

But Ray was getting more and more uneasy each moment since they had landed there. It seemed to him a most dangerous exploit, and while Old Cy had hunted over this curious confusion of slate ledges and stared at the rising film of smoke, Ray had covertly watched the lake's outlet.

"I don't think we'd better stay here much longer," he said at last. "We can't tell how soon that man may come back and catch us."

"Guess you're right," Old Cy asserted tersely, and after one more look at the inch-wide crack out of which the smoke rose, he led the way to their canoe.

"Thar's a cave thar, sure's a gun," he muttered, as they skirted the bold shore once more, "an' that smoke's comin' out on't. I wish I dared stay here a little longer 'n' hunt fer it."

Old Cy was right, there was a cave there beneath the slate ledge — in fact, two caves; and in one, safe and secure, as its owner the notorious McGuire believed, were concealed the savings of his lifetime.

More than that, so near do we often come to an important discovery and miss it, Old Cy had twice leaned against a slab of slate closing the entrance to this cave and access to a fortune, the heritage of Chip McGuire.

Ray's fears, while well founded, were needless, however. McGuire — for it was this outlaw whom they had ample reason to avoid — was many miles away. And yet so potent was the sense of danger, that neither Old Cy nor Ray thought of food, or ceased paddling one moment, until they had crossed the vast swamp and once more pulled their canoe out at the point where they had entered it the day before.

Here a brief halt for food and rest was taken; then they shouldered their light craft and started for Birch Camp.

In the meantime another canoe was ascending this winding stream, and long before nightfall, Pete Bolduc, sure that he was on the trail of McGuire, entered the ledge-bordered lake.

CHAPTER XIX

"If most on us cud see ourselves as the rest see us, we'd want to be hermits." — OLD CY WALKER.

To trail an enemy who is never without a rifle and the will to use it, requires courage and Indian cunning as well. Pete Bolduc had both, and after observing the many signs of a trapper's presence in the swamp, he knew, after he crossed it and reached this lake, that somewhere on its shores, his enemy, McGuire, had his lair.

He paused at the outlet, as did Old Cy, to scan every rod of its rocky shores, not once, but a dozen times.

The sun was now halfway down. A mellow autumn haze softened the encircling mountains and the broad, frowning peak to the right. A gentle breeze rippled the upper end of the lake, and here, in the wild rice growing along its borders, stood a deer, belly-deep in the green growth.

No thought of the blessed harmony of lake, sky, and forest, or the sequestered beauty of this spot, came to the half-breed. Revenge and murder —

twin demons of his nature — were in his heart, and the Indian cunning that made him hide while he watched for signs of his enemy. The bare peak overlooking the lake soon impressed him as a vantage point, and after a half-hour of watchful listening he laid his rifle across the thwart, handy to grasp on the instant, and, seizing his paddle once more, crossed the lake to the foot of the peak.

To hide his canoe here, ascend this with pack and rifle, was the next move of this human panther, and here in a sheltering crevasse he lay and watched for his enemy.

Two hours later, and just at sunset, McGuire returned to the lake.

As usual, he, too, paused at the outlet to scan its shores. He believed himself utterly secure here, and thought no human being was likely to find this lakelet. But for all that, he was watchful. Some exploring lumberman or some pioneer trapper might cross this vast swamp and find this lake during his absence.

A brief scrutiny assured him that he was still safe from human eyes, and he crossed the lake.

From the bare cliff a single keen and vengeful eye watched him.

As usual, also, McGuire made his landing at a

convenient point, some fifty rods from his cave, and carried his canoe up and turned it over, back of a low-jutting ridge of slate. He skinned the half-dozen prizes his traps had secured that day and followed a shallow defile to his lair. Here his pelts were stretched, a slab of slate was lifted from its position in a deep, wide crevasse between two of these ledges, and McGuire crawled into his den.

Most of these movements were observed by the half-breed, who, watching ever while he plotted and planned how best to catch his enemy unawares, saw him emerge from amid the ledges again, go down to the lake, return with a pail of water, and vanish once more.

All this was a curious proceeding, for he, like Old Cy, had expected to find McGuire occupying some bark shelter, and even now he supposed there was one among this confusion of bare rocks.

Another surprise soon came to this distant watcher, for he now saw a thin column of smoke rise from a ledge and continue in varying volume until hidden by twilight.

And now, secure in his cave and quite unconscious of the watcher with murderous intent who had observed his actions, McGuire was enjoying himself. He had built a little slate fireplace within his cave.

A funnel of the same easily fitted material carried the smoke up to a long, inch-wide fissure in the roof. He had a table of slate to eat from, handy by a bed filled with moss and dry grass, also pine knots for needed light.

Opening into this small cave was a lesser one, always cool and dry, for no rain nor melting snow could enter it, and here was McGuire's pantry, and here also a half-dozen tin cans, safely hidden under a slab of slate, stuffed with gold and bank-notes.

To still further protect this inner cave, he had fitted a section of slate to entirely fill its entrance.

When the last vestige of sunset had vanished and twinkling stars were reflected from the placid lake, the half-breed descended from his lookout point, and, launching his canoe, followed close to the shadowed shore and landed just above where McGuire disembarked. Indian that he was, he chose the hours of night and darkness to crawl up to the bark shelter which he expected to find, his intention being to thrust a rifle muzzle close to his enemy's head and then pull the trigger.

But to do this required a long wait and extreme caution. His enemy surely had a camp-fire behind a ledge, and shelter as well. The smoke had seemed

to rise out of a ledge, but certainly could not, and so — still unaware of McGuire's position, yet sure that he was amid these ledges, and near a shelter — Pete grasped his rifle and crept ashore.

It was too early to surprise his enemy — time to fall asleep must be allowed. Yet so eager was the half-breed to deal death to him, that he must needs come here to wait. No chances must be taken when he did crawl up to his victim, for a false step or the rattle of a loose stone, or his form outlined against the starlit sky as he crawled over a ledge, might mean death to him instead of McGuire. And so, crouching safely in a dark nook above the landing, Pete waited, watched, and listened.

One hour passed — it seemed two — and then the half-breed crept stealthily up to where the smoke had been seen. Not by strides, or even steps, but as a panther would, lifting one foot and feeling where it would rest and then another, and all the while listening and advancing again.

It was McGuire's habit, while staying here, to look at the weather prospects each night, and also to obtain a drink of cool lake water before going to sleep.

Often when the evenings were not too cold, he

would sit by the lake shore for a half-hour, smoking and watching its starlit or moon-glittering surface, and listening to the calls of night prowlers.

In spite of being an outlaw, devoid of moral nature, and one who preyed upon his fellow-man, he was not without sentiment, and the wild grandeur of these enclosing mountains, and the sense of security they gave, were pleasant to him. His life had been a harsh and brutal one. He had dealt in man's lust and love of liquor. He measured all humankind by his own standard of right and wrong, and believed that he must rob others or they would rob him. He had followed that belief implicitly from the start, and would so long as he lived. He felt that every man's hand was against him, and no reproaches of conscience had resulted from his cold-blooded killing of an officer. Never once did the thought return of the few years when a woman's hand sought his in tenderness, nor any sense of the unspeakable horror he had decreed for his own child.

So vile a wretch seemed unfit for God's green earth; and yet the silence of night beside this lake, and the stars mirrored on its motionless surface, soothed and satisfied him.

He had now and then another impulse — to some day take his savings of many years, secreted

He grasped and struck at this enemy in a blind instinct of self-preservation.

here, and go to some other country, assume another name, and lead a different life.

And now, while an unsuspected enemy was waiting for him to enter a sleep that should know no waking, he left his cave and seated himself on a shelf-like projection close to the lake, which was deep here, and the ledge shore a sheer face rising some ten feet above the water.

One hour or more this strange compound of brute and man sat there contemplating the stars, and then he suddenly detected a sound — only a faint one, the mere click of one pebble striking another.

He arose and listened.

Soon another soft, crushing sound reached him. Some animal creeping along in the passage between the ledges, he thought.

He stepped quickly to the end of the shelf. On that instant a crouching form rose upward and confronted him.

He had one moment only, but enough to see a tall man a step below him, the next a flash of spitting fire, a stinging pain in one shoulder, and this human panther leaped upon McGuire!

But life was sweet, even to McGuire, and as he grasped and struck at this enemy in a blind instinct of self-preservation as both closed in a death-grapple,

one instant of awful agony came to him as a knife entered his heart — a yell of mingled hate and deadly fear, as two bodies writhed on the narrow shelf, a plunging sound, as both struck the water below — and then silence.

Death and vengeance were clasped in one eternal embrace.

CHAPTER XX

"Thar's two things it don't pay to worry 'bout, — those ye can help 'n' and those ye can't." — OLD CY WALKER.

WHEN Old Cy and Ray once more made their way up the Beaver Brook valley, it was with the feeling that this lone and sinister trapper might be met at any moment. They dared not leave their canoe where it might be easily found, but adopting Indian tactics, Old Cy cunningly hid it in a rank growth of swamp grass, and oft doubling on their own tracks and wading the shallow stream, left only a confusing trail.

When the deadfalls had been visited and they began gum-gathering again, they watched constantly for an enemy.

A dense forest of tall spruces is at best a weird and ill-omened spot. Its vastness appalls, its shadows seem spectral, and every natural object becomes grotesque and distorted. An overturned stump with bleaching roots appears like a hideous devil-fish with arms ready to entwine and crush. A twisted tree trunk, prone, rotting, and coated with

moss, looks like a huge green serpent, and even a knot in the side of a big spruce will resemble a grinning gnome. Even the sunlight flitting through the dense canopy plays fantastic tricks, and every breath of wind becomes the moan of troubled spirits.

Something of this weird impress now assailed Old Cy and more especially Ray, and after two days of unpleasant work in this part of the wilderness, they gave it up.

"I don't like feelin' I'm bein' watched," Old Cy observed when they once more started for home, "an' to-morrer I guess we'd best go 'nother way. Thar's a good spruce growth over beyond the hogback, 'n' I'd feel safer leavin' the canoe whar Amzi kin keep an eye on't. We kin come up now once a week 'n' tend the deadfalls 'n' not leave the canoe more'n an hour."

Little did Old Cy realize how groundless his fears now were, or that fathoms deep, in a cold, mountain-hid lake, the thieving McGuire and the implacable half-breed were now locked in the clasp of death.

A change of location, however, banished somewhat of this spectral presence, and although Old Cy was ever alert and watchful, he showed no sign of it.

Ray, more volatile and with implicit faith in his

protector, soon returned to normal condition of mind and once more entered into the spirit of their work and sport with a keen zest.

The traps gave increased returns, the little bin where they stored their gum was filling slowly but surely, and their life at this wildwood home became enjoyable.

Neither was it all labor, for the ducks now migrating southward were alighting in the lake by thousands, a few hours' shooting at them from ambush made glorious sport, and what with all the partridges they had secured and these additions, their ice-house was soon unable to hold another bird.

But the halcyon days of autumn were fast passing and signs of nearing winter were now visible. Ice began to form in little coves, the ducks ceased coming, soon the last of them had departed, the leaves of all hardwood trees were now joining in a hurry-scurry dance with every passing breeze, the days were of a suggestive shortness, and soon the grim and merciless snow — the White Spirit of Old Tomah — would be sweeping over the wilderness.

And then one night the Frost King silently touched that rippled lake with his wand and the next morning Old Cy and Ray looked out upon its motionless expanse of black ice. The sky was also leaden, an ominous stillness brooded over forest, lake, and

mountain, and midway of that day, the first snowfall came.

Old Cy and Ray were a mile away from the cabin, busy at gum-gathering, when the first flakes sifted down through the canopied spruce tops. Soon the carpet of needles began to whiten, and by mid-afternoon they had to abandon work and return.

"I guess we come pretty clus to bein' prisoners now," Old Cy ejaculated when he shook himself free from the white coating on the cabin porch, "but we've got to make the best on't. We'll git warm fust 'n' then go 'n' fetch our canoe up 'n' stow it in the shed. We ain't like to want it ag'in 'fore spring. One thing is sartin," he added, when the fire began to blaze in the open fireplace, "we are sure o' keepin' warm 'n' 'nuff to eat this winter, 'n' that's all we really need in life, anyway. The rest on't is mostly imagination."

But in spite of his serene philosophy, Old Cy had dreaded the coming of winter more than Ray could guess, and all on account of that lad. He himself knew what a winter meant in this wilderness cabin, while Ray did not. Separated as they were from civilization by a full hundred miles, and from Tim's place by forty, they were, as he stated, practically prisoners for the next five months.

To escape on snow-shoes was possible, of course, if the need arose, and yet it would be a pretty serious venture, after all.

They were in no particular danger, however. With plenty of food and fuel, they need not suffer. If the cabin burned, they could erect another shelter or use the old one. Something of diversion could be obtained from ice-fishing or gum-gathering on warm days; but not enough, as Old Cy feared, to keep Ray content and free from the megrims.

None of these fears escaped Old Cy, however. He was too wise for that; and moreover, in order to inspire Ray, he now began to affect an almost boyish interest in the snow coming and its enjoyments.

"We can't do much more trappin'," he said that first winter evening beside the fire while the snow beat against the windows, "but we kin hev some fun keepin' warm an' cookin', 'n' when the snow hardens a bit we kin go fer gum again, or set tip-ups. We've got more'n a million shiners in the cage up the brook, 'n' 'fore it gits too cold, we'll ketch a lot o' trout."

It was this faculty for adaptation to the situation, this making the best of all circumstances and seizing all opportunities for pleasure or profit, that was Old Cy's woodwise characteristic. No matter if it

stormed, he knew that the sun shone behind the clouds. No matter if they were utterly isolated in this wilderness, he still saw ways of enjoyment, and even when snowbound, or shut in by zero weather, he would still find interest in cooking, keeping warm, or getting ready to fish, or in gathering gum, when the chance came.

But winter had now come upon them with a sudden swoop. The next day snow fell incessantly, and when the sun shone again, a two-foot level of it hid the lake.

Then, as if to test Ray's spirits, the temperature kept well below freezing for the next week, the wind blew continuously, sweeping the snow into drifts, and all the three could do, as Old Cy said, was to "cook vittles and keep warm."

And now for the first time, Ray began to show homesickness. From the day Chip had left, not once had he mentioned her or his aunt or uncle in any way. He had kept step, as it were, with Old Cy in all things adventurous as well as labor and sport.

The possible, even certain gain in the money value of the furs and gum which they had secured, coupled with their adventurous life, had occupied his every thought; but now that he could only help Old Cy indoors, he began to mope.

"I wonder what they are doing now down in Greenvale," he said one evening after they had gathered about the fire. "I wish we could hear from 'em."

It was the first sign of homesickness which Old Cy had so long dreaded to see in him.

"Oh, they ain't havin' half the fun we are," Old Cy answered cheerfully. "Jest now I callate Chip's studyin' 'longside o' Aunt Comfort's fire; mebbe Angie 'n' Martin's over to Dr. Sol's, swappin' yarns. To-morrer Chip'll go ter school, ez usual, 'n' when Sunday comes they'll all dress up 'n' go ter meetin'. One thing is sartin, they ain't takin' any more comfort'n we are, or gittin' better things to eat. If the weather warms up, ez I callate it will in a day or two, we'll pull some trout out o' the lake that 'ud make all Greenvale stare. They allus bite sharp arter a cold spell. Ez fer Chip," he continued, eying Ray's sober face, "she ain't goin' to fergit ye, never fear, an' when I take ye out o' the woods in the spring 'n' start ye fer Greenvale with five hundred dollars in yer inside pocket, ez I callate, ye'll feel's though ye owned the hull town when ye git thar, an' Chip'll feel ez tho' she owned ye."

"I wish I could hear how they are once in a while," Ray rejoined. "They may be sick."

That "they" meant Chip was self-evident.

Once a mood comes upon a person, it is hard to change it, and of all the moods that torture poor human beings, the love mood is the most implacable. While the zest of trapping was upon Ray, he was himself and a cheerful enough lad. There had also been the spice of danger from this unknown, thieving trapper; but when both had vanished, and all that was left for excitement was the monotony of indoor life, with occasional half-days when fishing through the ice was permissible, his spirits fell to low tide.

Old Cy had feared this from the outset, but believing that the experience here was the best possible for the boy, to say nothing of the financial side, he had brought it about. And now he had his hands full.

But he was equal to it. Next to sport, work, he knew, was the best panacea for any mental disorder, and work a-plenty he now found for Ray. First, it had been the making of tip-ups for use on the lake, then snow-shoes for both of them, and then cutting and splitting more wood. They had an ample supply already, piled high in a lean-to alongside the big cabin, but Old Cy asserted that it was not enough, and so more was added.

The paths, one to the lake to obtain water and one to the ice-house, were allotted to Ray to keep open.

A few days were consumed in filling the ice-house once more, and when a warm day came, Old Cy led the way to the sheltered side of the lake, as enthusiastic as a boy, to begin cutting holes and setting lines for fishing.

This especially interested Ray, and one good day with a fine catch of trout would revive his spirits for some time.

Each and every evening, also, when the social side came, Old Cy, always a prolific story-teller, would engage in his favorite pastime for a purpose.

And what a marvellous fund he had to draw from! All the years when he, a sailor boy, had sailed afar, all the strange countries and people he had visited, and all the mishaps he had met were now levied upon.

When these failed — and it was not soon — his wilderness wanderings before he settled down at Greenvale furnished tales, and when facts became scarce, his fancies came into play, and many a thrilling shipwreck and hair-breadth escape that never happened, held Ray's attention for a long evening.

The banjo also helped out for many an hour. The old hermit with his jews'-harp joined in, and although Ray's fingers were prone to stray to "solemn" tunes, Old Cy persisted in his calls for livelier songs, even to the extent of adding his voice; and so the first few weeks of winter wore away.

When Christmas neared, however, Ray had a "spell." It had been a calendar day in his memory, and he had been one of the crowd of young folks who made merry in the usual ways; but now no cheer was possible, he believed, and once more he began to look glum.

It may seem rank foolishness and doubtless was, yet Ray, like all humanity, must be measured by his years and judged by his surroundings.

In Greenvale he had been one of fifty schoolmates whose lives and moods were akin, and whose enjoyments must be much the same. Here he was, in a way, utterly alone so far as age means companionship, and worse than that, one of his two companions was morose and misanthropic. True, he twanged his jews'-harp in tune with Ray's plantation melodies, but when that bond of feeling ceased, he lapsed into chill silence once more.

But Old Cy, wise philosopher that he was, saw and felt every mood and tense that came to Ray, and, seeing thus, forestalled each and every one.

"Christmas is 'most here," he said to Ray, a few days before, "an' I've been figgerin' we three ought to celebrate it 'cordin' to the best o' our means. We can't do much in the way o' gifts, but we kin bust ourselves with vittles 'n' have some fun, just the same. I've kinder mapped out the day sorter this way, if it's pleasant. Fust, we'll hev an arly breakfast, then pack a lot o' things on the hand-sled, go 'cross the lake 'n' round to the cove facin' the south. Here we'll cut a few holes, set some lines, 'n' while you're tendin' 'em, Amzi 'n' me'll clear a spot under the bank, build a bough lean-to facin' the sun, spread blankets in it, 'n' when noon comes, cook a meal fit fer the gods. We kin hev briled venison, fried trout jist out o' the water, boiled taters, hot coffee, 'n' an appetite that'll make ye lick yer fingers 'n' holler fer more. If only the sun shines, we kin hev a heap o' fun."

It was all a boyish diversion as planned by Old Cy, and the sole object was to tide Ray over a day that might add to his homesickness. The weather favored this kindly interest.

Christmas morn opened warm, and but for the deep snow it might have been an October day. Old Cy's romantic plan also materialized to the fullest, and when his green bough shed, with carpet of the same, was completed, the fire in front blazing cheerfully and dinner cooking, it was all a picture well worth a study.

Then as if to prove that good luck trots in double harness, about this time the trout began to bite, and the line of tip-ups across the cove were flagging exciting signals that kept Ray and the old hermit on the jump. Even when their picturesque Christmas dinner was spread upon an improvised table in front of the bough shelter, Ray could hardly leave the sport to eat, and Old Cy had to interfere.

"We ain't ketchin' fish to sell," he said to Ray, "but jist fer fun. You've got more'n we kin eat in two weeks, so give 'em a rest."

When dinner was over there came a lazy lounging hour on the fir boughs in the warm sun, while Old Cy smoked his pipe of content.

Ray, however, could not resist the signal flags any longer, and as soon as the meal was eaten he was out tending them again.

When the sun was halfway down, again the

happy trio broke camp and returned to the cabin, carrying fish enough to feed a multitude. That evening Old Cy told stories as usual, Ray picked his banjo and sang lively songs, and so ended Christmas in the wilderness.

Our lives are but a succession of moods, varying ever as our surroundings change; and so it was with Ray, isolated as he was with two old men for companions. With work or sport to interest him, he was cheerful and content. But when, as now happened, another long and heavy snowfall succeeded that mellow Christmas Day, he grew morose. It was selfish, perhaps, and thoughtless, as youth ever is, and yet not surprising; for when the sun shone again, they were practically buried under snow. It took an entire day, with all three working, to shovel paths to the lake and ice-house, and when that was done there was naught else except to cook and keep the fire going. A few days of this bore heavily on Ray's spirits, and he became so glum that Old Cy took him to task.

"You've got to brace up, my boy," he said one evening, "an' likewise count yer blessin's. We are shut up fer a spell, but think how much worse off ye might be. We've got plenty to eat 'n' keep

warm with, thar's a good three hundred pounds o' gum we got, an' it's worth over four hundred dollars, say nothin' o' the furs, 'n' all yourn. Then, 'nother thing, ye mustn't keep broodin' over yer own lonesomeness so much. I'll 'low ye're kind o' anxious to see the little gal ag'in, as is nat'ral; but s'pose it was two years ye hed to look forrard to, a-waitin', an' then on top o' that, arter waitin' so long, ye hed to face three more, with never a chance to larn whether she was dead or alive!"

And now Old Cy paused, and watched the low-burning fire as if living once more in bygone days.

"It seems a long time, these months," he continued at last, glancing at Ray, "an' so 'tis; but I had a longer spell on't once, an' it ended the way I hope your waitin' won't. It all happened more'n forty years ago, 'n' I've never told nobody 'bout it since.

"I was born in Bayport, that's a seaport town, an' me 'n' my only brother took to the sea at an arly age. We had sweethearts, too, and, curislike, they was sisters. Mine was Abbie Grey — sweet Abbie Grey they used to call her, an' she well desarved it.

"Wal, I used to see her 'tween viages, mebbe a week or two, onct in six or twelve months o'

waitin', an' them was spells I've lived over hundreds o' times, I kin tell ye. We 'greed to hitch up finally arter I made one more viage, 'n' I went off, feelin' life ahead was all apple orchards 'n' sunshine."

He paused, looked long at the dying embers once more, and then continued: "Life is all a mix-up o' hopes 'n' disapp'intments, tho', an' the brighter the hopes the more sartin they are to be upset. I started on that viage feelin' heaven was waitin' fer me at shore, 'n' I seemed to 'a' sailed right into the other place, fer our ship sprung a leak 'n' foundered. We took to the boats, ez I told ye onct. Most o' my crew died afore I was picked up, 'n' then the whaler that took me aboard was bound on a four years' viage. That was bad enough, but worse was possible, fer she fetched up on a coral island one night toward the last on't, and 'twas plumb six years 'fore I heard from home 'n' Abbie. Things had happened thar in that time, too, an' I was told my brother had been given up ez lost, 'n' Abbie, believin' we both was dead, had married 'nother man. I was so upsot I never let her know I was alive, 'n' she don't know it to-day, if she's still livin', which I hope she is."

For a long time now Old Cy remained silent,

his head bowed, his eyes closed, as that long-ago page of memories returned, while Ray watched him.

"Life is a curis puzzle," he added at last, "an' we all live in to-morrers. Fust we are like boys chasin' Jack-lanterns, rushin' on all the time, 'spectin' most o' the trouble is past 'n' the future is all rosy. We don't figger much on to-day, but callate next week, next month, next year, is goin' to be more sunshiny, till we get old 'n' gray 'n' grumpy, 'n' nobody wants us 'round."

Once more he ceased speaking, and once more his eyes closed. Five, ten, twenty minutes passed while Ray watched Old Age in repose and the fire quite died away.

"It's gittin' chilly," Old Cy said at last, suddenly rousing himself from his dream of the long ago and sweet Abbie Grey, "an' we'd best turn in."

CHAPTER XXI

"The biggest fool thing — an' we all do it — is shakin' hands with trouble 'fore ye meet it." — OLD CY WALKER.

FOR two months life at Birch Camp much resembled that of a woodchuck or a squirrel. Now and then a day came when the crusted snow permitted a gum-gathering trip into the forest, or a few midday hours at ice-fishing; and never were the first signs of spring more welcome than to those winter-bound prisoners. The wise counsel and patient example of Old Cy had not been lost upon Ray, either; and that winter's experience had changed him to an almost marvellous degree. He was no longer a moody and selfish boy, thinking only of his own privations, but more of a man, who realized that he had duties and obligations toward others, as well as himself.

With the returning sun and vanishing snow, animal life was once more astir, and a short season of trapping was again entered upon, and mingled with that a few days more of gum-gathering. It was brief and at a disadvantage, for ice still covered

the lake, and until that disappeared no use of the canoes could be made.

Once well under way, however, spring returned with speed, the brooks began to overflow, the lake to rise, and one morning, instead of a white expanse of watery ice, it was a blue and rippled lake once more.

And now plans for Ray's return to Greenvale were in order, and the sole topic of discussion. He was as eager as a boy anxious for the close of school, and for a double reason, which is self-evident.

It was agreed that Old Cy and himself should make the trip out together in two canoes, and convey their stores of gum and firs. At the settlement these were to be packed, to await later sale and shipment. Old Cy would then return to camp, and Ray would go on to Greenvale.

A change in this plan came in an unexpected manner, however, for a few days before the one set for departure, Old Cy, always on watch, saw a canoe enter the lake, and who should appear but Levi, Martin's old guide.

"I've been cookin' up at a lumber camp on the Moosehorn," he explained, after greetings had been exchanged, "an' I thought I would make a trip up here an' call on ye 'fore I went out."

How welcome he was, and how all, even Amzi, of those winter-bound prisoners vied with each other in making him the guest of honor, need not be asserted. He had been a part of their life here the previous summer, with all its joys and dangers, and now seemed one of them.

When mutual experiences and their winter's history had been exchanged, of course Chip's rescue, the half-breed's escape, and the whereabouts of her father came up for discussion that evening.

"I've heard from Tim's Place two or three times this winter," said Levi, "an' neither Pete nor old McGuire has been seen or heard on since early last fall. Pete got thar all safe, but vowed revenge on McGuire, as Martin and I found, when we went out. He stayed round a week or so, I heard later, and then started for his cabin on the Fox Hole, 'n' since then hain't never been seen or heard of by nobody. Tim an' Mike went over to his cabin 'long in the winter, but no signs of him was found, or even of his bein' thar since snow came. McGuire also seems to hev dropped out o' business and ain't been heard on since in the summer. We've expected him all winter at the lumber camp, but he didn't show up."

"We've seen him," put in Old Cy, flashing a smile at Ray, "leastwise I callated 'twas him, though I never let on to that effect. He was trappin' over beyond a big swamp last fall, 'n' he paid us a visit, stole a half-dozen o' our catches 'n' left his trade-mark on our canoe." And then Old Cy told the story of their adventure, omitting, however, any reference to the supposed cave.

"It's curis what has become o' him," Levi said, when the tale was told, "and our camp crowd all believe that thar's been foul play, with Pete at the bottom on't. Nobody's shed any tears, though, an' I'm thinkin' the woods is well rid o' him. He's been a terror to everybody long enough."

Much more of this backwoods gossip and change of experience filled in the evening, and next morning Old Cy gave Ray a word of caution.

"I kept whist 'bout our findin' what we callated was a cave," he said, "an' I want you to. This matter o' McGuire and the half-breed ain't blowed over yit, an' we don't want to git mixed up in it. Ez fer the cave, if we 'lowed we found one, the folks at Tim's Place 'ud go huntin' fer it, sure, 'n' I've my reasons for not wantin' they should go. So mum's the word to Levi 'bout it."

Levi's arrival, however, changed their plans,

for he at once offered to convoy Ray out of the woods, thus relieving Old Cy, and three days later these two, with well-laden canoes, started on the out-going journey.

It was not without incident, for when the main stream was reached, it was dotted with floating logs and the red-shirted drivers with the bateaux and spike shoes were in evidence. A monster jam was met at the first rapid, the bags of gum nuts, bundles of firs, and canoes had to be carried around it, and when Tim's Place was reached, a score of the good-natured woodsmen were in possession.

Levi discreetly avoided all questions as to what Tim knew of Chip, her father, or the half-breed. Ray's lips were also sealed, and so both escaped much questioning. Here, also, they learned what both had guessed — that McGuire and Pete had either left the wilderness or had perished that winter. Where and how, if such was the case, no one seemed to know or care, and a close observer would have said that every one at Tim's Place hoped that these two outlaws had met their fate.

Old Tomah was also found at Tim's Place, and he was undeniably glad to see both Ray and Levi, and to learn that Chip was likely to be well cared for.

When these two voyagers were ready to start, he joined and kept with them until the settlement was reached. Knowing full well the value of gum and furs, he soon found a purchaser for Ray's store and stock at its full value; and when that youth, now elated as never before, was ready to start for Greenvale, this fine old Indian showed almost a white man's emotion.

"Take this to little girl," he said, handing Ray a package, "and tell her Old Tomah not forget. He hope she come back to see him soon."

"Tell Mr. Frisbie I shall be here, waitin' to meet him, when he sends word," Levi said; and shaking hands with both of his good friends, Ray now bade them good-by with many thanks for all they had done.

Of his homeward trip and all the charming anticipations now his, no mention need be made. They are but the flowers wisely strewn in the pathway of youth, and Ray — now more a man than when he entered the woods — full well deserved all that lay before him.

But Old Tomah's heart was sad, and far away beside a rippled lake was another who felt the same.

CHAPTER XXII

"When ye see two hearts tryin' to beat ez one, gin 'em the chance."—OLD CY WALKER.

CHIP'S success and popularity in Greenvale was practically nullified by Hannah, who from wounded vanity and petty jealousy became her enemy from the outset.

Aunt Comfort did not know it. Angie was not conscious of the facts, or, busy with her own social duties and home-making, gave them no thought. And yet, inspired by Hannah's malicious tongue, Greenvale looked upon poor Chip as one it was best to avoid.

With Angie as sponsor, she had been made one of the Christmas church decorators, and had been twice invited to parties, only to exasperate Hannah all the more and cause an increase of sneers.

"She's nobody an' an upstart," Hannah said at the first meeting of the village sewing circle after Chip's advent, "an' I've my doubts about her father an' mother ever bein' married. Then she's an infiddle an' believes in Injun sperrits an'

hobgoblin things she calls spites, an' is a reg'lar heathen. I don't trust her a minit, an' never leave the house 'thout I lock up my things."

Much more of this sort fell from Hannah's lips whenever occasion offered, though never within hearing of Aunt Comfort or Angie. Neither did the townspeople enlighten them, and so the undercurrent of innuendo and gossip, once started by Hannah, spread until all Greenvale looked askance at Chip.

There was also some color for this ill repute, for Angie had concealed nothing, and Chip, foolishly perhaps, had asserted her belief when it would have been better to conceal it.

The parson also, chagrined at his failure to make a convert of the girl, referred to her as "rebellious, obstinate in her ideas, and one who needed chastening."

Her teacher, however, was her stanch friend. Aunt Comfort beamed upon her morning and night, while Angie, having provided her with home, raiment, opportunity for schooling, escort to church, and much good advice, felt that she had fulfilled her duty. And in a way, she had.

But social recognition in a country village can be made or marred by such a person as Hannah, and quite unknown to those most interested,

Chip's popularity was not decreed. Neither was she conscious of this undercurrent. Each day she went to and returned from school in a sturdy sort of way. A most devoted pupil, she never failed to thank her teacher for every word of help, and if — thanks to Hannah — she failed to make friends about the village, she won a place near to Aunt Comfort's heart.

But somehow Aunt Comfort, who loved everybody alike, good or bad, or at least spoke no ill of the bad ones, didn't count. That she must inevitably take Chip under her motherly wing, all recognized. She had taken Hannah, then Angie and Nezer, and now this waif who, as Hannah insisted, was all bad; and according to Greenvale's belief, Aunt Comfort would keep on "taking in" homeless waifs and outcast mortals as long as she lived, or house room held out. And it was true.

By midwinter Martin's new house was all furnished, and social obligations began to interest Angie, which made matters all the worse for Chip, for now Hannah could persecute her with less danger of exposure.

But Chip was hard to persecute. She had known adversity in its worst form. Her life at Tim's Place had been practical slavery, and the

worst that Hannah could do was as pin pricks compared to it.

It is certain, also, if Chip had "spunked up," as Hannah would call it, now and then, it would have been better for her; but it wasn't Chip's way. To work and suffer in silence had been her lot at Tim's Place. Angie had said, "You must obey everybody and make friends," and impelled by experience, and this somewhat broad order, Chip was doing her best.

One hope cheered her all that long, hard winter of monotonous study — the return of Ray, and possibly Old Cy, when summer came. Somehow these two had knit themselves into her life as no one else had or could. Then she wondered how Ray would seem to and feel toward her when he came, and if the little bond — a wondrous strong one, as far as her feelings went — would still call him to her side.

Of love and its real meaning she was scarce conscious as yet. She simply felt that this youth with his sunny face and brown eyes was the one being on earth she wished to please. All the romance and pathos of that summer idyl, all the moonlight and canoeing, all the songs he had charmed her with, and every word and act of his from that first evening when, ragged and starving, she had

stumbled into the camp, until she had parted from him with misty eyes, had been lived over by her countless times.

It had all been a beacon of hope to her in the uphill road toward the temple of learning; and how hard she had studied, and how patiently she had tried to correct her own speech, not even her teacher guessed.

Few of us can see ourselves as others see us, and yet Chip, mature of mind as one just entering womanhood, realized somewhat her own condition. Perhaps, also, she was conscious in some degree as to why she was not more popular, but that was a matter of scant interest to her. All she wished and all she strove for was to learn what others knew, speak as others spoke, and act as they acted; and all for one end and purpose — to win favor in the eyes of Ray.

And so no one, not even Hannah, whose prying eyes saw all things, guessed her secret.

A little of gall and bitterness was now and then meted out to Hannah in return for all her sneers, for Chip's teacher occasionally spent an evening at Aunt Comfort's, and every word of praise she let fall for her pupil was a thorn to Hannah. But she revenged herself, as might be expected.

"I think that Injun gal's a witch," she said once to her bosom friend after one of these unpleasant evenings, "the way she pulls wool over Miss Phinney's eyes by pretending she's so anxious to learn. You'd think to hear her go on that learnin' was all she was livin' for, and her teacher almost an angel. I think Angie must 'a' ben spell-bound the same way when she fetched her here to crowd out her betters."

But Chip, fortunately, was still unconscious of the extent and injury of Hannah's malice.

With the coming of springtime and green grass, life for Chip assumed a more smiling face, for now she could fly to the hillsides, and for the time being imagine herself at the lake once more. Somehow Greenvale as a whole had impressed her as cold and unloving, and to escape it was a relief. Her teacher was dear to her, Aunt Comfort a kindly mother, Angie a good friend; but none were kin to her and never could be, as she more and more realized.

Then, too, poor Chip, in spite of Tim's Place, was growing homesick for the wilderness again; or, to be more accurate, for the little lake where her heart had been touched by the wand of love.

With some insight into books and a developing

mind came a keener sensitiveness, and what people thought of her and how they felt toward her became of more consequence. Her life was simple. She rose early. assisted as a housemaid in Aunt Comfort's home, departed at a set time for school with its six hours of almost unbroken study, and, most prized of all, a few moments' companionship with her teacher. To her Chip had confided all her joys and sorrows and most of her history as well. And be it said to Miss Phinney's credit, she had discretion and honor enough not to betray Chip's confidence.

It is also possible, in fact almost certain, that that unfortunate waif's somewhat pitiful tale had won her teacher's interest and affection as naught else could. Only one reservation was made by Chip — her own feelings toward Ray. All else became an open book to Miss Phinney.

When school was out, the two walked homeward together as far as their ways permitted, and then Chip obtained the one hour of the day which she felt was quite her own. At first, during the autumn days, she had used it for a scamper through the nut-brown woods. When winter came and it was not too cold, she occasionally visited the mill pond above the village, where, if the conditions were right, all the skating and sliding youth were gathered; and

when blessed spring returned, it was away to the hills and fields once more.

On Saturdays she seldom left the house, unless sent on an errand, and Sunday became a day of penance.

"I don't know why folks watch me so much when I go to meetin'," Chip complained once to her teacher, "but they do, and I don't like it. I can see now why they did when I first came. I guess they thought I was an Injun, maybe; but what do I do now to make 'em so curious?"

"Oh, I wouldn't mind them," Miss Phinney answered soothingly, "no one intends to annoy you; but it takes a long time for people here to become accustomed to a stranger."

Miss Phinney dared not tell her pupil that her somewhat wild belief and unquestionably rude origin and early life formed the basis of this curiosity.

And now, when the flowers and birds had once more returned to Greenvale, and Ray might return any day, a little plan that Chip had had in mind for many weeks took shape. She knew Ray must come on the stage, and eager for a sight of his face as only love can make one, she meant to be the first to meet and greet him.

A mile down the village street and beyond the last house was a sharp hilltop. The stage usually reached here about an hour after the close of school, and to this vantage point, where she could hide behind a stone wall, Chip now betook herself each day.

Her plans for meeting her young hero were well considered. She was sure he would, like herself, prefer a seat with Uncle Joe. That important person, whose heart she had won by her admiration of his horses on her arrival, would surely invite her to ride into the village, if he saw her. If he was alone, she would remain hid; but if *some one* was with him, she would then disclose herself and the coveted invitation and meeting with Ray would follow.

It was a vague, uncertain plan. No one in Greenvale had the remotest idea when Ray would return. Chip only knew that he was expected in the spring. The day, or even week, was a long-range guess. But even that slim chance poor, lonesome, heart-longing Chip would not miss, and so each day at close of school she hurried to her lookout point to watch and wait.

It was a silly, almost hopeless sentinelship, as she knew well enough; but with the dog's heart that was hers, she would keep her vigil, and like one of

those dumb brutes, wait weeks, months, ay, years even, for a master coming.

It was mid-April when Chip began her daily watch, and missed no day unless a pelting rain prevented. It was June ere she won her reward, and then one balmy afternoon when she saw the stage afar, there, perched beside Uncle Joe, was — a companion!

How sure that weary, waiting waif was that her heart was not mistaken! How her pulses leaped and thrilled as the slow-moving stage crept up the hill; and how Ray, eager to catch the first glimpse of his native village, saw a winsome, smiling face shaded by a flower-decked hat, peeping at him over a wall, was but a minor episode in the lives of these two; yet one to be recalled many, many times afterward and always with a heartache.

None came to them now, for on the instant Ray saw who was waiting for him he halted the stage, and the next moment he was beside his sweetheart. And Uncle Joe, with the wisdom and sympathy of old age, discreetly averted his face, and said "Golang" to his horses, and drove on alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

"There ain't but few folks smell woollen quite quick enough."
— Old Cy Walker.

During all the long weeks while Chip had awaited her lover's coming, one hope had been hers — that his return would end all her loneliness and begin a season of the happy, care-free days like those by the lake once more.

And there were many reasons for it.

In this quiet, strictly religious, gossip-loving village, a dependant upon charity, as it were, and with Hannah's sneers, Chip had slowly but surely learned how little akin she was to them all, and how distrustful they all were of her. This knowledge had come by degrees: first, from the way in which the older pupils at school regarded her, having always kept aloof; then the insistent staring she received each Sunday at church; the somewhat chilly reception she had met in a social way; and lastly, a seeming indifference on Angie's part. There was no reason for it all, so far as Chip could understand. She walked in the straight and narrow path laid out for

her each day, made herself useful between school hours at Aunt Comfort's, studied hard, thanked Angie for every trifle, and after her first unfortunate experience in defending her belief in spites and Old Tomah's hobgoblins, she had never referred to them again. But the seeming fact that she was disliked and unwelcome here had slowly forced itself upon her and added to her loneliness.

It was all to end, however, when Ray came. In him or from him she would find a welcome. He knew her as she was, and what she was. He had not been distrustful, but tender and loving, and all clouds and sorrow and all humiliations would fade away when he came.

She had pictured to herself, also, how much they would be together and where; how he would come to Aunt Comfort's the first evening and tell all about his winter in the wilderness and Old Cy, — all about the trap-setting, gum-gathering, and the deep snows she knew so much about. Maybe he would bring his banjo now and then and play and sing the darky songs she had hummed so many times. Possibly he might come and meet her occasionally on the way home from school; and when vacation came, how many long rambles they would take in the dear old woods, with no such ogre as the half-breed to

spoil them. It had all been a rosy-hued dream with her, while she waited his coming. And now he was here!

For the first few moments after he kissed her upraised lips, she could not speak for very joy; and then, as hand in hand they started toward the village, her speech came.

"I've been so lonesome," she said simply, "I've counted the days, and come down here to meet you daily, for over a month. I don't like it here, and nobody likes me, I guess. I'm so glad you've come, though. Now I shan't be lonesome no more. I've studied hard, too," she added, with an accent of pride. "I can read and spell words of six syllables. I've ciphered up to decimal fractions, an' begun grammar."

"I'm glad to get home, too," answered Ray, as simply. "It was lonesome in the woods all winter, when we couldn't tend the traps. But I've made a lot of money — 'most five hundred dollars — all mine, too. How is everybody?" And so they dropped from sentiment into commonplace.

At the tavern he secured his belongings. At the corner where their ways parted, he bade Chip a light good-by, and with an "I'll see you soon," left her.

Her hero had arrived. They had met, kissed as

lovers should, and the lonely waiting and watching days were at an end and a new life was to begin for Chip.

Little did she realize what it would mean for her, or how utterly her hopes were to fail.

"He will come to-night," her heart assured her, and that evening, without a word to Aunt Comfort or Hannah as to whom she expected, she arrayed herself in her one best dress and awaited his expected visit.

And what a propitious and all-favoring evening it was! The June night was balmy. Blooming lilacs and syringas half hid, as well as adorned, the porch of Aunt Comfort's home. Aunt Comfort had just departed to make a call, Hannah was away at prayer meeting, and "no one nigh to hinder."

But Chip waited in vain!

The drowsy hum of the Mizzy Falls, up the village street, came to her; the fireflies twinkled amid the dense-growing maples and over the broad meadows; whippoorwills called across the valley; but no lover came to Chip. One, two, almost three hours she waited and watched. Then came Aunt Comfort and Hannah, and heavy-hearted and lonesome once more, poor Chip retired.

At school next day her mind and heart were at

war. The parts of speech and rules of subtraction and division seemed complete chaos, and when homeward bound, she loitered slowly along, hoping Ray would make amends and meet her on the way. But again he failed to appear.

And that night, when alone with Hannah, a worse blow came.

"I heerd young Stetson got back yesterday," she said, fixing her steely blue eyes on Chip, "an' you went down the road to meet him. I should think you'd be 'shamed o' yourself. If you're callatin' on settin' your cap for him, 'twon't do a mite o' good. His aunt wouldn't think o' havin' sich an outcast ez you for him — that I can tell ye."

But not a word of reply came from poor Chip. Such speeches were not new to her, and she had long before ceased to answer them. But this one, from its very truth, hurt more than all others had, and, crushed by it, she stole away out of the house.

No thought that Ray might call came to her. She only wished to escape somewhere, that she might cry away her misery and shame in solitude.

The evening was but a repetition of the previous one. The same sweet influence and silvered light was all about, but no heed of its beauty came to Chip. Instead, she felt herself a shameful thing

of no account. Her lover had failed her — now she knew why, and as she sped along the lonely way to the schoolhouse, scarce conscious of her steps, all hope and all joy left her. Why or for what purpose she was hurrying toward this deserted little building, she knew not. Hot tears filled her eyes. Shame surged in her heart. She was a nobody in the eyes of all her world, and once she had reached the worn sill, so often crossed by her, she threw herself upon it and sobbed in utter despair.

For a long hour she sat there while the tide of feeling ebbed and tears came unchecked, and then the reaction came. With it, also, came something of the old courage and defiance that had once led her to face night, danger, and sixty miles of wilderness alone.

"I have made a mistake," she said, sitting up, "and Hannah was right. I am a nobody here, and Ray has been told so and has kept away."

And now with returning calm, and soothed, maybe, by the still, ethereal night, she saw herself, her past and present, as it all was. Back in an instant she sped in thought to the moment when, kneeling to these people, she begged for food; back to that first prayer she ever heard in the tent, and the offer of rescue that followed.

And then her life here, with all its hopes and humiliation, rose before her.

"It was all wrong, my coming here," she said, looking away to the village where lights twinkled; "I am not their sort, nor they mine. I'd better go away."

Then, lifted a wee bit by this new resolve, she rose and returned to the house.

The tall clock in the sitting room was just chiming ten when she entered, and Aunt Comfort was there alone.

"Raymond was here this evening," she said kindly, "and waited quite a spell. Where have you been?"

"Oh, nowhere," answered Chip, pleasantly, "only I was lonesome and went out for a walk."

Little did good Aunt Comfort realize what a volcano of hope, despair, shame, and tender love was concealed beneath that calm answer, or the new resolve budding in Chip's heart.

No more did Ray suspect it when he met her coming home from school the next afternoon.

For during those two wretched hours when she was alone on the worn schoolhouse step, poor Chip McGuire, the low-born, pitiful waif, had become a woman and put away girlish impulses.

"I couldn't come to see you that first evening," he said at once, "for uncle and aunty kept me talking till bedtime. Where were you last night?"

"Oh, I didn't much think you would come," answered Chip, calmly, smiling at him in a far-off way. "I am a nobody here, as you will soon find out, and I don't expect — anything. I got lonesome last night and went off for a walk."

Ray looked at her in wide-eyed astonishment. And well he might, for only two short days since she had met him, an eager, simple girl, and now she spoke like a woman. No word, no hint of his neglect, escaped her; but a cool indifference was apparent.

"Tell me about the woods and Old Cy," she said, not waiting for him to speak again, "and how is the hermit? I want to know all about them."

"Oh, I left 'em all right," answered Ray, sullenly, for like a boy he wanted to be coaxed. And then, urged a little by Chip, he told his winter's experience.

One episode interested her most of all — the strange trapper's doings, his theft of their game, their pursuit of him and discovery of his hiding spot.

"I know who that was," she said, when it was all described. "It was my father, and if he had caught you spying upon him, I guess he'd shot you both.

He always used to go somewhere trapping every fall; but nobody could ever find where."

This return to the memories of the wilderness wore away something of Chip's cool reserve, and when the house was reached her eyes had grown tender.

"I shall be glad to see you often — as — as your folks will let you come," she said, somewhat timidly when they parted; and scarce understanding this speech, Ray left her.

"Chip has changed a whole lot," he said to his aunt a little later, "and I wish she hadn't; she don't seem the same any more."

"I'm glad of it if she has," answered Angie, smiling at him. "There was need enough of it."

CHAPTER XXIV

Old Cy had builded wiser than he realized when he coaxed Ray to spend a winter in the woods.

The long tramps through the vast wilderness; the keen hunt for signs of mink, fisher, otter, and wild-cat, with constant guard against danger; the unremitting though zestful labor of gum-gathering; the far-sighted need for winter preparation; and last but not least Old Cy's cheerful philosophy, had broadened the lad and developed both muscle and mind.

His success, too, had encouraged him. He was eager to try another season there, and planned for hiring men to gather gum, and saw in this vocation possible future.

But the change in Chip puzzled him. He had returned, expecting to find her the same timid, yet courageous little girl, ready to be his companion at all times and to kiss him when he chose — a somewhat better-educated girl, of course, using more refined language, but otherwise the same confiding child, as it were.

She was all this the day of his return; and then, presto! like a sudden blast of cold air came a change. Too loyal to her to question any one, he could only wonder why this change.

He called again soon after that first, unsatisfying walk home with her, to find her the same cool, collected young lady. She was nice to him, induced him to talk of the woods once more and his own plans; but it was not the Chip of old who listened, but quite another person.

"I am going back to the lake with uncle and aunt," he said at last, "and I mean to coax them to take you along. You have been shut up in school so long, it will do you good."

"Please don't say a word to them about it," she urged, in hurt tone, "for it will do no good. I wouldn't go, anyway."

"Not go to the woods if you could," he exclaimed in astonishment; "why, what do you mean?"

"Just what I say," she returned firmly, and then added wistfully, "I'd fly there, if I had wings. I'd give my life, almost, for one more summer like the last. But I shall not go again now, and maybe never."

It was unaccountable and quite beyond Ray's ken — this strange decision of hers — and her

"Please don't say any more about it" closed the subject.

Another and even greater shock came to Ray when late that evening, on the porch, he essayed to kiss her.

"No, no; please don't," she said with almost a sob, pushing him away. "It's silly now, and — and — you mustn't."

A week later school closed, and Chip's conduct was then also a puzzle to Miss Phinney. As usual on these occasions, when the hour came, each pupil, young and old, filed past the teacher at her desk, the boys to shake hands, the girls to be kissed, and all bade good-by, after which they trooped away, glad to escape.

This ceremony now took place as usual. All departed except Chip, and she remained at her desk. Some intuition of pity or sympathy drew Miss Phinney to her at once; and then, at the first word from her, Chip gave way to tears — not light ones, but sobs that shook her as a great grief. Vainly Miss Phinney tried to cheer and console her, stroking the bowed head until her own eyes grew misty.

"I didn't mean to give way," Chip said at last, looking up and brushing away the tears, "but you've been so good and patient with me, I couldn't help

it. I hain't many friends here, I guess, and —" choking back another sob — "I shall be more lonesome'n ever."

It was true enough, as Miss Phinney well understood, and somehow her heart went out to this unfortunate girl now, as never before.

"You mustn't think about that," she said at last, in her most soothing voice, "but come and see me as often as you can — every day, if you like, for I shall always be glad to have you. I'd keep on studying, if I were you," she added, as Chip brightened, "it will help you on, and I will gladly hear you recite every day."

Then hand in hand, like two sisters, they left the dear old schoolhouse. Little did Miss Phinney, good soul that she was, realize how recently poor Chip had cried her heart almost out on its well-worn sill, or that never again would this strange, winsome, woman-grown pupil enter that temple.

At the parting of their ways the two embraced, kissed, and with tear-dimmed eyes separated.

"I can't account for it," Miss Phinney said to herself when well away. "It may be a love-affair with young Stetson, or it may be something worse."

That evening she called on Angie. The result was fruitless, so far as obtaining any light upon this

puzzling matter was concerned, for Angie was either blind to the situation, or feigned ignorance.

"They were together all last summer, of course," she said, "in fact, they were forced to be like two children, you know. I was glad to have it so, feeling it would benefit the girl. If any love flame was started then, it has had ample time to die out since."

"There is something else the matter with Chip, then," Miss Phinney rejoined, "she has been moody and quite upset at times for the past few weeks, and to-day when school closed, she sobbed like a broken-hearted woman. It was quite pathetic, and I had to cry myself."

That night Angie took counsel of her husband.

"Well, what if it is so," he responded, to her suggestion that a love-affair might have started between them. "It won't harm either. So far as I've observed, the girl couldn't have been better behaved since she came here. She has never missed an hour at school all winter, no matter how cold it has been. Her teacher says she has made wonderful progress. She has attended church with you every Sunday, and as for Ray — well, if I were in his shoes, I'd be in love with her myself."

It was clear enough that Angie's fears were not shared by Martin.

"But think of her origin and parentage," answered Angie, "and that outlaw father who might appear at any time! The very idea of Ray marrying her is preposterous. It would wreck his life."

"But what about Chip?" returned Martin, who had broader views of life. "You brought her here to Christianize and educate her; do you propose to turn her adrift because she has a pretty face and the boy sees it? She isn't to blame for her origin. As for Ray, if he shows that he is able to support a wife and wants her, I honor him for it, and I'll give him a house to start with."

At Aunt Comfort's, however, no signs of love troubles were visible; in fact, no signs of any sort, except the malicious "hanging around" interference of Hannah whenever Ray was there. She seemed to feel it her duty to remain on guard at such times, much to Ray's disgust. No annoyance at this was apparent in Chip. She helped at housework, studied at odd hours, and when Ray came she met and talked with him as if he were a brother.

The day he was to leave Greenvale was close at hand, however, and the evening before he came early, bringing his banjo, and by tacit consent, perhaps to escape Hannah, they both left the house at once.

Just above the village there was a long, narrow pond, wooded upon one side and around its upper end, with partially cleared land and scattered trees along the opposite bank. One of these trees was a monster beech near the water's edge, the trunk of which was scarred by many entwined initials.

To this lovers' trysting tree now came Ray and Chip.

The evening was not one for romance, for no moon graced it — only stars were reflected from the pond's motionless surface, while fireflies twinkled above it.

The shadow of the near parting also hovered over these two as, hand in hand, they picked their way up and along the bank; and once seated beneath the tree, it seemed to forbid speech.

"I wish you'd play some of the songs you used to," Chip said at last hurriedly, "I'd like to think I'm back at the lake again."

Glad to do so, Ray drew out his banjo and began to tune it. He started a song also — one of the "graveyardy" ones which Old Cy had interdicted, but choked at once and stopped abruptly.

"I can't sing to-night," he said, "I'm too blue about going away."

There were two in this frame of mind, evidently,

for Chip made no protest, and for another long interval they watched the fireflies and listened to the whippoorwills.

"I wish you were going back with us," Ray said at last. "It breaks my heart to go away so soon and leave you. Why won't you let me ask my uncle to take you? He might be glad to do it, just for me."

"No," answered Chip, firmly, "you mustn't. It would shame me so that I couldn't look them in the face." Then, as if this subject and their own feelings must be avoided, she added hurriedly, "Tell me what you will do when the folks come back — whether you will come with them or stay at the lake?"

"Stay there, I suppose," answered Ray, somewhat doggedly, for money-making and love were in conflict. "Old Cy says we can make a lot of money if I will. I wish I were rich," he added with a sigh.

He was not the first young man to whom that wish had come at such a moment. But converse between them was at ebb tide just now, and the parting moment, ever creeping nearer, overshadowed all else. To Chip — known only to herself — it meant forever. To Ray, another long isolation from all the world and young associates, and all for a few hundred dollars sorely needed by him, yet seeming

of scant value compared to the sweet companionship of this maid.

Then Chip's feelings and the reason for them were quite beyond him. He could not see why she was unwilling to ask to be taken to the woods again, nor why she held herself aloof from him. She had not done so at the lake, or when they met again, and why should she now?

Something of this might have been inferred by Chip, for she suddenly arose.

"I think we'd best go back," she said. "It's time, and Hannah will be watching for me."

What Ray might have said had he been a world-wise man, does not matter. What he did was to pick up his useless banjo, and clasping Chip's arm, led her along the winding walk.

Below the falls and near the house they paused, for now the last moment alone together had come, and with it the real parting.

"Tell Old Cy I — I haven't forgot him," whispered Chip, her voice quivering, "and — and — you won't forget me either, will you, Ray?"

That little sob in her speech was all that was needed to break away the barrier between them, for the next instant Ray's arms were about the girl.

No words of love, no protestations, no promises.

Only one instant's meeting of soul and impulse, fierce as love of life, sacred as the hand of death.

Love consecrated it. The shadowing maples blessed it. The stars hallowed it.

And yet it was a long, long parting.

When Ray rode away next morning, he watched for her at the first sharp hilltop.

It was in vain, for Chip's resolve had been taken, and he never saw the forlorn figure crouching behind that bush-topped wall, or knew that two wistful, misty eyes had seen him depart.

Few of us ever see even a faint image of ourselves as others see us; and yet, calm reflection spurred to self-analysis by a hungry heart occasionally effects that almost miracle.

In Ray's case it did; for after his eager eyes had scanned every rod of that roadside trysting-place in vain, a revelation came to him — not a wide open one, such as he deserved, but a glance at himself and his conduct as it had been. First he saw Chip just as she entered their camp that night in the wilderness, so pitiful in appearance, so pathetic in her abject gratitude. Once again he looked at her appealing eyes growing misty while he played and sang his old-time love songs. He remembered that during all the days, weeks, and months following,

he had never failed to find the love-light of admiration when his eyes met hers. It had all been a summer idyl, so sweet, so romantic, so tender, and so unexpected that he had scarce realized its value — not at all then, but faintly now.

For all that up-hill, down-dale journey to Riverton, he lived over this moonlit lake and wilderness camp episode, and every hour and every thought shared with him by this girl — a playmate and lover combined — returned again like echoes of past and gone heart throbs, each time a little sweeter, each time a trifle more piercing, until his own self-complacency faded quite away and an abject penitence began to replace it. For the first time in his callow youth he began to reflect, and once started on this beneficial course, the barometer of his vanity fell rapidly. It was not long ere his own conduct since he returned to Greenvale also added an assault. He had utterly failed to realize the meaning of Chip's abject devotion — her pitiful first-hour confessions of how hard she had studied, and all for his sake; how she had counted days and hours until he was likely to return; how many times she had gone to the hilltop to watch for him; and even the eagerness of her arms and the warmth of her lips at that first moment of meeting, now came back to him.

Another and even a more painful self-reproach followed this — his own neglect of opportunities and the result.

He had returned to Greenvale feeling that Chip was his devoted slave and had found that she was. Like many another arrogant youth, he had plumed himself upon that fact, taking everything for granted. He had yielded to his aunt's and other friends' coaxings to tell his past winter's history of life in the woods, feeling that Chip could and would wait; and then, an unexpected and most vexatious frost had fallen upon his little love-garden, and presto! his confiding sweetheart, his almost abject slave, was one no longer.

At the moment of starting, that wildwood camp and charming lake had seemed a Mecca which he must hasten to reach once more. When he again beheld it, it had lost its fairness, and to return to Greenvale and beg and implore Chip's forgiveness — ay, even kneel to her, if need be — seemed the only duty life held.

His punishment had only just begun.

PART II

VERA RAYMOND

CHAPTER XXV

For a few more days, Chip lived the life that had now become unbearable, and then the end came. It was hastened, perhaps, by Hannah, for that ill-tempered spinster had been ever watchful, and with shrewd insight had seen or guessed all that had transpired.

"I s'pose ye know why the Frisbies hurried away so soon after Ray got back," she said to Chip that last day. "If you don't, I can tell ye. It was 'cos they noticed the goin's on 'tween you an' him, an' wanted to head it off."

Not a word of protest came from the poor child in response to this sneer, and that night she wrote two notes, one to Miss Phinney, the other to Aunt Comfort. Then, making a bundle of the few belongings she could call her own — the beaded moccasins, cap, and fur cape old Tomah had given her, and other trifles — she waited until almost midnight and stole out of the house.

Once before she had left her only shelter, in a more desperate mood. Now the same impulse

nerved her, and for ample reason. Dependent upon the bounty of those in no wise kin to her, tortured by the sarcastic tongue of Hannah, her heart hungering for a love she believed could never be hers, no other outcome seemed possible; and defiant still, yet saddened beyond all words, she set out to escape it all.

Where to go, she knew not nor cared — only to leave Greenvale and all the shame, sorrow, and humiliation it held for her, and make her own way in the world as best she could.

The village street was as silent as midnight always found it. The low murmur of the Mizzy Falls whispered down the valley. A half-moon was just rising, and as Chip reached the hilltop where she had waited for Ray, she halted. From here must be taken the last glance at Greenvale, and as she turned about a sob rose in her heart, in spite of her stern resolve, for ties cannot be sundered easily.

And how vivid and life-lasting was that picture! The two long rows of white houses facing the broad street, the tall-spired church in the middle of them; scattered dwellings to the right and left; away to one side the little brown schoolhouse that had been her Mecca; the stream that wound through the broad meadows; and over all the faint sheen of the rising moon.

Only for a moment she paused for this good-bye look, then turned and ran. On and on she sped mile after mile, up hill, down hill, halting now and then for breath until a cross-road was reached, and here she stopped. Here also came the question of direction. To follow the main road was to reach Riverton, between which and Greenvale the stage journeyed. To go there meant being recognized perhaps. In her study of geography, she had found that the village which was her birthplace lay north-east from Greenvale. She meant sometime and somehow to reach that spot and visit her mother's grave once more, and also, if possible, to send word to Old Tomah. And so guided by this vague plan, she turned to the left.

From now on the road became narrow. Miles elapsed between houses, and Chip, wearied and heavy-eyed, could only creep along. The way became more devious now, bending around a wooded hill and then crossing a wide swamp to enter a stretch of forest. Direction became lost in these turnings, the road grew hilly and less travelled. The moon scarce showed it; and Chip, almost exhausted, stumbled over stones and felt that she was becoming lost in an unsettled country. And then, just as she emerged from a thicket and ascended a low hill, the

light of coming dawn faced her, and with it the need of sleep and concealment.

Full well she knew she must avoid all observing eyes and place many more miles between herself and Greenvale to be certain of escape. And then, as the daylight increased, she caught sight of an old, almost ruined dwelling half hid among bushes just ahead. Even if empty, as it appeared, it would serve for shelter, and finding it so, she crept in, so wearied that she fell asleep at once on the warped and mouldy floor.

It was only a brief nap, for soon the rattle of a passing farm wagon woke her, but refreshed somewhat by it, she again pushed on.

Soon a brook, singing cheerfully as it tumbled down a ledge, was reached, and here Chip bathed her face and hands and drank of the sweet, cool water.

Hunger also asserted itself, but that did not daunt her. She had faced it once before.

Then something of a plan as to her future movements began to shape itself in her mind, following which came an increased courage and self-reliance. Not a cent did she now possess. Food she could not have until she had made good her escape and could earn it somewhere.

But the sun was shining, the birds were singing, her young, supple body was strong, life and the world were ahead; and, best of all, never again would she have to feel herself a dependant upon any one.

With these blessings, scant to most of us, hardened as she had been by servitude at Tim's Place, came a certain buoyancy of spirit and defiance of all things human.

No wild beasts were here to menace, no spites to creep and crawl along fence or hedgerow, no hideous half-breed to pursue, and as she counted her blessings, while her spirits rose, a new life and new hope came to her.

And now another feeling came — the certainty that she had come so far that no one would recognize her. At first that morning, when she heard a team coming or overtaking her, she had hidden by the roadside until it passed. When a house was sighted ahead, she made a wide detour in the fields to avoid it. Now this sense of caution vanished, and she strode on fearless and confident.

When night came again she crept into an unused sheep barn, and when daylight wakened her, she hurried on once more.

During all that first day's journey, her one fear

had been that some one she would meet might recognize her and report the fact in Greenvale. To avoid that had been her sole thought. Now that feeling of danger was vanishing, and when people were met, she looked at them fearlessly and kept on. When cross-roads were reached and a choice in ways became necessary, she followed the one nearest to northeast, and for the reason that her school map had shown that her birthplace lay in this direction. How far away it was, she had not the faintest idea, or whether she could live to reach it. Her sole thought was to escape Greenvale and the humiliating life of dependence there, and when she was so far away that no one could find her, obtain work at some farm-house.

All that second day she plodded on that same patient up-hill, down-dale journey, never halting except to pick a few berries, or where a brook crossed the road to obtain a handful of water-cress or some sweet-flag buds.

Now and then villages were passed, again it was country sparsely settled, where farm-houses were wide apart, and when this day was waning, even these had vanished and she found herself in almost a wilderness once more.

Hills now met her already weary feet; they seemed

never ending, for as the crown of one was reached, another met her eyes. The roadway also became badly gullied, always stony, with grass growing in the hollows.

By now she was faint and dizzy from two days' fasting, and so footsore that she could scarce limp along. So far her defiant pride had kept her from begging food, but now that was weakening, and at the next house she would have asked a morsel. But no next house came. Only the same scrub growth along the wayside with now and then a patch of forest, with never a fence even, to indicate human ownership.

The sun had now vanished. Already the stretches of forest were shadowy, and as Chip reached the apex of another long hill, beyond and far below she could see another darkened valley. Night seemed creeping up from it to meet her. Not a house, not even a fence or recent clearing — only the unending tangle of green growth and this dark vale beyond.

"I guess I'll starve 'fore I find another house," poor Chip muttered, and then as the utter desolation of her situation and surroundings were realized for a moment, her defiant courage gave way.

For two days and half a night she had plodded on without food and with scarce a moment's rest. Her

feet were blistered, her eyes smarted from sun and dust, her head swam. She was miles away from any human habitation, footsore, weary, and despondent, with night enclosing her — a homeless waif, still clinging to the small bundle that contained her all.

But now as she crouched by the roadside, too exhausted to move on, the memory of those three days and nights of horror, one year ago, came to her. Her plight was bad enough now, but nothing to compare with what it was then, and as all the terror and desperation of that mad flight now returned, it renewed her courage.

"I ain't so bad off as I was then," she said. "I'm sure of finding a house to-morrow."

And now, as if this moment marked the turning-point of her fortunes, from far down the hill she had climbed, came the faint creak, creak, and jolting sound of an ascending wagon. Slowly it neared, until just at the hilltop where Chip sat, the tired horse halted, and its driver saw her rise almost beside the wagon.

"Mister," she said, "I'm nearly tuckered out and 'bout starved. Won't you please give me a lift an' a chance to earn my vittles for a day or two?"

The man gave a low whistle.

"Why sartin, sartin," he answered in a moment,

"Won't you please give me a lift an' a chance to earn my vittles for a day or two?"

"but who be ye? I thought for a minute ye was a sperit. Git up here," he added, without waiting for a reply and moving to make room. Then as Chip obeyed, he chirruped to his horse and down the hill they rattled.

"Who might be ye, girlie, an' whar'd ye come from?" he asked again, as they came to another ascent and the horse walked.

"My name's Vera, Vera — Raymond," answered Chip, "an' I run away from where I was livin'."

"That's curis," answered the old man, glancing at her; "whar'd ye run away from, some poor farm?"

"No, sir," replied Chip, almost defiantly, "but I guess I was a sort o' pauper. I was livin' with folks that fetched me out o' the woods an' was schoolin' me, and I couldn't stand it, so I run away. I don't want to tell where they be, or where I came from either," she added in a moment, "for I don't want them ever to find me."

"Wal, that's a proper sort o' feelin'," responded the man, still looking at his passenger, "an' I don't mind. I live down beyond here in what's called the Holler. Somebody called it Peaceful Valley once. We'll take keer o' ye to-night 'n' to-morrer we'll see what's best to be done. I guess ye need a hum 'bout ez bad ez a body kin, anyway."

And so Chip McGuire, waif of the wilderness and erstwhile protégée of a philanthropic woman, as Vera Raymond found another home, and began still another life with this old farmer, Judson Walker, and his wife Mandy.

But a sorrow deeper far than Chip ever realized fell upon Aunt Comfort when her brimming eyes read her note the morning after her flight.

"Dear Aunt Comfort,

"I can't stand Hannah or being a pauper any longer. She as good as told me I wanted your money and I never thought of it. She said I wasn't good enough for Ray, either, and that was the reason Mrs. Frisbie took him away so soon. I know I ain't good for nothin' nor nobody, but I didn't ask to be fetched here and I am going away, never, never, never to come back. If ever I can, I will pay you and Mrs. Frisbie for all I've eat and had.

"Good-bye Forever,

"Chip."

CHAPTER XXVI

"There's a heap o' comfort in lookin' on the dark side o' life cheerfully." — OLD CY WALKER.

OLD CY especially found life dull after Ray had gone. The hermit also appeared to miss him and became more morose than ever. He never had been what might be termed social, speaking only when spoken to, and then only in the fewest possible words. Now Old Cy became almost a walking sphinx, and found that time passed slowly. His heartstrings had somehow become entwined with Ray's hopes and plans. He had bent every energy and thought to secure for Ray a valuable stock of furs and gum, and, as was his nature, felt a keen satisfaction in helping that youth to a few hundred dollars.

Now Ray had departed, furs, gum, and all. He had promised to return with Martin and Angie later on, but of that Old Cy felt somewhat dubious, and so the old man mourned.

There was no real reason for it, for all Nature was now smiling. The lake was blue and rippled by

the June breezes; trout leaped out of it night and morning; flowers were blooming, squirrels frisking, birds singing and nest-building; and what Old Cy most enjoyed, the vernal season was at hand.

Another matter also disturbed him — the whereabouts of McGuire and the half-breed, Pete Bolduc.

Levi had brought the information that neither had been seen nor heard of since the previous autumn; but that was not conclusive, and somehow Old Cy felt that a certain mystery had attached itself to them, and once we suspect a mystery, it pursues us like a phantom. He did not fear either of these renegades, however. He had never harmed them. But he felt that any day might bring a call from one or the other, or that some tragic outcome would be disclosed.

Another problem also annoyed him — who this thief of their game could be, and whether his supposed cave lair was a permanent hiding-spot.

Two reasons had kept Old Cy from another visit to that sequestered lake during the fall trapping season: first, its evident danger, and then lack of time. But now, with nothing to do except wait for the incoming ones, an impulse to visit again this mysterious spot came to him.

He had, at the former excursion, felt almost cer-

tain that this unknown trapper was either McGuire or the half-breed. Some assertions made by Levi seemed to corroborate that theory, and impelled by it, Old Cy started alone, one morning, to visit this lake again. It took him until midday to carry his canoe, camp outfit, rifle, and all across from stream to stream, and twilight had come ere he reached the lagoon where he and Ray had left the main stream and camped. Up here Old Cy now turned his canoe, and repairing the bark shack they had built, which had been crushed by winter's snow, he camped there again.

Next morning, bright and early, he launched his canoe and once more followed the winding stream through the dark gorge and out into the rippled lake again.

Here he halted and looked about.

No signs of aught human could be seen. The long, narrow lakelet sparkled beneath the morning sun. The bald mountain frowned upon it, the jagged ledges just across faced him like serried ramparts, an eagle slowly circled overhead, and, best indication of primal solitude, an antlered deer stood looking at him from out an opening above the ledges.

"Guess I'm alone here!" exclaimed Old Cy, glancing around; "but if this ain't a pictur worth

rememberin', I never saw one. Wish I could take it with me into t'other world; an' if I was sure o' findin' a spot like it thar, I'd never worry 'bout goin' when my time comes."

After a long wait, as if he wanted to observe every detail of this wondrous picture of wildwood beauty, he dipped his paddle, crossed the sheet of rippled water, and stepped ashore at the very spot where he and Ray had landed over eight months before.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, glancing around, "if thar ain't a canoe, bottom up! Two, by ginger!" he added, as he saw another drawn out and half hid by a low ledge.

To this second one he hastened at once, and looked into it.

It had evidently rested there all winter, for it was partially filled with water, and half afloat in it were two paddles and a setting pole. A gunny-cloth bag, evidently containing the usual cooking outfit of a woodsman, lay soaking in one end, a frying-pan and an axe were rusting in the other, and a coating of mould had browned each crossbar and thwart.

"Been here quite a spell, all winter, I guess," muttered Old Cy, looking it over, and then he advanced to the other canoe. That was, as he as-

serted, bottom up, and also lay half hid back of a jutting ledge of slate. Two paddles leaned against this ledge, and near by was another setting pole. All three of these familiar objects were brown with damp mould and evidently had rested there many months.

"Curis, curis," muttered Old Cy again. "I callated I'd find nothin' here, 'n' here's two canoes left to rot, 'n' been here all winter."

Then with a vague sense of need, he returned to his canoe, seized his rifle, looked all around, over the lake, up into the green tangle above the ledges, and finally followed the narrow passage leading to where he had once watched smoke arise. Here on top of this ledge he again halted and looked about.

Back of it was the same V-shaped cleft across which a cord had held drying pelts, the cord was still there, and below it he could see the dark skins amid the confusion of jagged stones.

Turning, he stepped from this ledge to the lower one nearer the lake, walked down its slope, and looked about again. At its foot was a long, narrow, shelf-like projection, ending at the corner of the ledge. Old Cy followed this to its end and stepped down into a narrow crevasse.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, taking a backward step as he did so.

And well he might, for there at his feet lay a rifle coated with rust beside a brown felt hat.

Had a grinning skull met his eyes, he would not have been more astounded. In fact, that was the next object he expected to see, and he glanced up and down the crevasse for it. None leered at him, however, and picking up the rusted weapon, he continued his search.

Two rods or so below where he had climbed the upper ledge, he was halted again, for there, at his hand almost, was a curious doorlike opening some three feet high and one foot wide, back of an outstanding slab of slate.

The two abandoned canoes had surprised him, the rusty rifle astonished him, but this, a self-evident cave entrance, almost took his breath away.

For one instant he glanced at it, stepped back a step, dropped the rusty rifle and cocked his own, as if expecting a ghost or panther to emerge. None came, however, and once more Old Cy advanced and peered into this opening. A faint light illumined its interior — a weird slant of sunlight, yet enough to show a roomy cavern.

The mystery was solved. This surely was the hiding-spot of the strange trapper!

"Can't see why I missed it afore," Old Cy muttered,

kneeling that he might better look within, and sniffing at the peculiar odor. "Wonder if the cuss is dead in thar, or what smells so!"

Then he arose and grasped the slab of slate. One slight pull and it fell aside.

"A nat'ral door, by hokey!" exclaimed Old Cy, and once more he knelt and looked in.

The bravest man will hesitate a moment before entering such a cavern, prefaced, so to speak, by two abandoned canoes, a rusty rifle, human head covering, each and all bespeaking something tragic, and Old Cy was no exception. That he had come upon some grewsome mystery was apparent. Canoes were not left to rot in the wilderness or rifles dropped without cause.

And then, that hat!

Surely here, or hereabout, had been enacted a drama of murderous nature, and inside this cavern might repose its blood-stained sequel.

But the filtering beams of light encouraged Old Cy, and he entered. No ghastly corpse confronted him, but instead a human, if cramped, abode. A fireplace deftly fashioned of slate occupied one side of this cave; in front a low table of the same flat stone, resting upon small ones; and upon the table were rusty tin dishes, a few mouldy hardtack, a

knife, fork, and scraps of meat, exhaling the odor of decay. A smell of smoke from the charred wood in the fireplace mingled with it all. In one corner was a bed of brown fir twigs, also mouldy, a blanket, and tanned deerskins.

The cave was of oval, irregular shape, barely high enough for Old Cy to stand upright. Across its roof, on either side of the rude chimney, a narrow crack admitted light, and as he looked about, he saw in the dim light another doorlike opening into still another cave. Into this he peered, but could see nothing.

"A queer livin' spot," he muttered at last, "a reg'lar human panther den. An' 'twas out o' this I seen the smoke come. An' here's his gun," he added, as, more accustomed to the dim light, he saw one in a corner. "Two guns, two canoes, an' nobody to hum," he continued. "I'm safe, anyhow. But I've got to peek into that other cave, sartin sure," and he withdrew to the open air.

A visit to a couple of birches soon provided means of light, and he again entered the cave. One moment more, and then a flaring torch of bark was thrust into the inner cave, a mere crevasse not four feet wide, and stooping, as he now had to, Old Cy entered and knelt while he looked about.

He saw nothing here of interest except the serried rows of jutting slate, across two of which lay a slab of the same — no vestige of aught human, and Old Cy was about to retreat when his flare burning close to his finger tips unnoticed, caused him to drop it on the instant, and drawing another from his pocket he lit it while the flame lasted in the first one.

It is said that great discoveries are almost invariably made by some trifling accident — a gold mine found by stumbling over a stone, a valley prolific of diamonds disclosed by digging for water.

In this case it was true, for as Old Cy bent to light his second torch ere he withdrew from the inner cave, a flash of reflected light came from beneath this slab — only for one second, but enough to attract his attention.

He stooped again and lifted the slab. Six large tin cans had been hidden by it. He grasped one and could scarce lift it. Again his fingers closed over it. He crawled backward to the better-lighted cave and drew the cover off the can with eager motion, and poured a heap of shining, glittering coin out upon that food-littered table.

Into that dark hole he dived again, as a starved dog leaps for food, seized the cans, two at a time, almost tumbled back, and emptied them. Four

had been filled with gold coin and two stuffed with paper money.

Folded with these bills of all denominations from one to fifty dollars was a legal paper yellowed by age, with a red seal still glowing like a spot of blood.

It was an innholder's license, authorizing one Thomas McGuire to furnish food, shelter, and entertainment for man and beast.

With eyes almost tear-dimmed and heart throbbing at having found poor Chip's splendid heritage, Old Cy now gazed at it.

The sharp stones upon which he knelt nearly pierced his flesh, but he felt them not.

The glint of sunlight from the crack above caressed his scant gray hairs and white fringing beard, forming almost a halo, yet he knew it not.

He only knew that here, before him, on this rude stone table, lay thousands of dollars, all belonging to the child he loved.

"Thank God, little gal," he said at last, "I've found what belongs to ye, 'n' ye hain't got to want for nothin' no more. I wish I could kiss ye now."

Little did he realize that at this very moment of thankfulness for her sake, poor Chip was lost to all who knew her, and, half starved and almost hopeless, knew not where to find shelter.

"Thank God, little gal, I've found what belongs to ye."

CHAPTER XXVII

"When life looks darkest to ye, count yer blessin's, boy, count yer blessin's." — OLD CY WALKER.

WHEN the sun rose again and Chip awoke, she scarce knew where she was. Outside, and almost reaching the one window of her little room, was the top of an apple tree in full bloom. Below she could hear ducks quacking, now and then a barnyard monarch's defiant crow, from farther away came the rippling sound of running water, and as she lay and listened to the medley, a robin lit on the tree-top not ten feet away and chirped as he peered into her window. A scent of lavender mingled with apple blossoms became noticeable; then the few and very old-fashioned fittings of the room, — a chest of drawers with little brass handles, over it a narrow mirror with gilt frame, two wood-seated chairs painted blue, and white muslin curtains draped away from the window.

And now, conscious that she was in some strange place, back in an instant came the three days of her long, weary tramp, the nights when she had slept

in a sheep barn and in a deserted dwelling, and at last, faint, footsore, and almost hopeless, she had been rescued from another night with only the sky for a roof.

Then the quaint old man, so much like Old Cy, whom she had accosted, the rattling, bumping ride down into this valley, and the halt where a cheery light beamed its welcome and a motherly woman made it real.

It was all so unexpected, so satisfying, so protective of herself, that Chip could hardly realize how it had come about.

No questions had been asked of her here. These two quaint old people had taken her as she was — dusty, dirty, and travel-worn. She had bathed and been helped to an ample meal and shown to this sweet-smelling room as if she had been their own daughter.

"They must be awful kind sort o' people," Chip thought, and then creeping out of bed she dressed, and taking her stockings and sadly worn shoes in hand softly descended the stairs.

No one seemed astir anywhere. The ticking of a tall clock in the sitting room was the only sound, the back door was wide open, and out of this Chip passed and, seating herself on a bench, began

putting on stockings and shoes. This was scarce done ere she heard a step and saw the old man emerge from the same door.

"Wal, Pattycake, how air ye?" he asked, smiling. "I heerd ye creepin' downstairs like a mouse, but I was up, 'n' 'bout dressed. Hope ye slept well. It's Sunday," he added, without waiting for a reply, "an' we don't git up quite so arly ez usual. Ye can help Mandy 'bout breakfast now, if ye like, 'n' I'll do the milkin'."

And this marked the entry of Chip into the new home, and outlined her duties. No more questions were asked of her. She was taken at her own valuation — a needy girl, willing to work for her board, insisting on it, and yet, in a few days, so hospitable were these people and so winsome was Chip, that she stepped into their affection, as it were, almost without effort.

"I don't think we best quiz her much," Uncle Jud (as he was known) said to his wife that first night. "I found her on the top o' Bangall Hill, where she riz up like a ghost. She 'lowed she run away from somewhar, but where 'twas, she didn't want to tell. My 'pinion is thar's a love 'fair at the bottom on't all; but whether it's so or not, it ain't none o' our business. She needs a home, sartin

sure. She says she means to airn her keep, which is the right sperit, an' long as she minds us, she kin have it."

That Chip "airned her keep" and something more was soon evinced, for in two weeks it was "Aunt Mandy" and "Uncle Jud" from her, and "Patty" or "Pattycake," the nickname given her that first morning, from them. More than that, so rapidly had she won her way here that by now Uncle Jud had visited the Riggsville store, some four miles down this valley, and materials for two dresses, new shoes, a broad sun hat, and other much-needed clothing were bought for Chip.

Neither was it all one-sided, for these people, well-to-do in their isolated home, were also quite alone. Their two boys had grown up, gone away and married, and had homes of their own, and the company of a bright and winsome girl like Chip was needed in this home.

Her adoption and acceptance of it were like a small stream flowing into a larger one, for the reason that these people were almost primitive in location and custom.

"We don't go to meetin' Sundays," Uncle Jud had explained that first day after breakfast. "We're sorter heathen, I s'pose; but then ag'in, thar ain't

no chance. Thar used to be meetin's down to the Corners, 'n' a parson; but he only got four hundred a year, an' hard work to collect that, 'n' so he gin the job up. Since then the meetin'-house has kinder gone to pieces, 'n' the Corner folks use it now for storin' tools. We obsarve Sundays here by bein' sorter lazy, 'n' I go fishin' some or pickin' berries."

To Chip, reared at Tim's Place, and whose knowledge of Sunday was its strict observance at Greenvale, this seemed a relief. Sundays there had never been pleasant days to her. She could not understand what the preaching and praying meant, or why people needed to look so solemn on that day. She had been stared at so much at church, also, that the ordeal had become painful. The parson had, on two occasions, glared and glowered at her while he assured her that her opinions and belief in spites were rank heresy and that she was a wicked heathen; and, all in all, religion was not to her taste. With these people she was to escape it, and instead of being imprisoned for long, weary hours while being stared at each Sunday, she was likely to have perfect freedom and a chance to go with this nice old man on a fishing or berry-picking jaunt.

And then Uncle Jud was so much like Old Cy in ways and speech that her heart was won. And

besides these blessings, the old farm-house, hidden away between two ranges of wooded hills, seemed so out of the world and so secure from observation that she felt that no one from Greenvale ever could or would discover her. She had meant to hide herself from all who knew her, had changed her name for that purpose, and here and now it was accomplished.

That first Sunday, also, became a halcyon one for her, for after chores, in the performance of which Chip made herself useful, Uncle Jud took his fish-pole, and giving her the basket to carry, led the way to the brook, and for four bright sunny hours, Chip knew not the lapse of time while she watched the leaping, laughing stream, and her second Old Cy pulling trout from each pool and cascade.

And so her new life began.

But the change was not made without some cost to her feelings, for heartstrings reach far, and Miss Phinney and her months of patient teaching were not forgotten.

Aunt Comfort and her benign face oft returned to Chip, "and dear Old Cy," as she always thought of him, still oftener. Ray's face also lingered in her heart. Now and then she caught herself humming some darky song, and never once did the moon

smile into this quiet vale that her thoughts did not speed away to that wildwood lake, with its rippled path of silver, the dark bordering forest, and how she wielded a paddle while her young lover picked his banjo.

No word or hint of all this bygone life and romance ever fell from her lips. It was a page in her memory that must never be turned, — an idyl to be forgotten, — and yet forget it she could not, in spite of will or wishes.

And now as the summer days sped by, and Chip helping Uncle Jud in the meadows or Aunt Mandy about the house, and winning love from both, saw a new realm open before her. There was in the sitting room of this quaint home a tall bookcase, its shelves filled with a motley collection of books: works on science, astronomy, geology, botany, and the like; books of travel and adventure; stories of strange countries and people never heard of by Chip; and novels by Scott, Lever, Cooper, and Hardy. These last, especially Scott and Cooper, appealed most to Chip, and once she began them, every spare hour, and often until long past midnight, she became lost in this new world.

"I know all about how folks live in the woods," she said one Sunday to Uncle Jud, when half through

"The Deerslayer." "I was brought up there. I know how Injuns live and what they believe. I had an old Injun friend once. I've got the moccasins and fur cape he gave me now. His name was Tomah, 'n' he believed in queer things that sometimes creep an' sometimes run faster'n we can."

It was her first reference to her old life, but once begun, she never paused until all her queer history had been related.

"I didn't mean to tell it," she explained in conclusion, "for I don't want nobody to know where I came from, an' I hope you won't tell."

How near she came to disclosing what was of far more importance to herself and these people than old Tomah's superstition she never knew, or that all that saved her was her reference to Old Cy by that name only.

More than that, and like Old Cy standing over the cave where her heritage lay hid, she had no suspicion that this kindly old man, so much like him in looks and speech, was his brother.

With the coming of September, however, a visitor was announced. "Aunt Abby's comin' to stay with us a spell," Uncle Jud said that day; "she's Mandy's sister, Abigail Bemis, an' she lives at Christmas Cove. It's a shore town, 'bout a hundred

miles from here. She ain't much like Mandy," he added confidentially to Chip; "she's more book-larned, so you'll have to mind your *p*'s and *q*'s. If ye like, ye can go with me to the station to meet her."

And so it came to pass that a few days later, Chip, dressed in her best, rode to the station with Uncle Jud in the old carryall, and there met this visitor.

She was not a welcome guest, so far as Chip was concerned, wonted as she had now become to Uncle Jud and Aunt Mandy, whose speech, like her own, was not "book-larned," and for this reason, Chip felt afraid of her. So much so, in fact, that for a few days she scarce dared speak at all.

Her timidity wore away in due time, for Aunt Abby — a counterpart of her sister — was in no wise awe-inspiring. She saw Chip as she was, and soon felt an interest in her and her peculiar history, or what was known of it. She also noted Chip's interest in books, and guessing more than she had been told, was not long in forming correct conclusions.

"What do you intend to do with this runaway girl?" she said one day to her sister, "keep her here and let her grow up in ignorance, or what?"

"Wal, we ain't thought much about that," responded Mandy, "at least not yet. She ain't got

no relations to look arter her, so far ez we kin larn. She's company for us, 'n' willin'. Uncle Jud sets lots of store by her. She is with him from morn till night, and handy at all sorts o' work. This is how 'tis with us here, an' now what do you say?"

For a moment Aunt Abby meditated. "You ought to do your duty by her," she said at last, "and she certainly needs more schooling."

"We can send her down to the Corners when school begins, if you think we orter," returned her sister, timidly; "but we hate to lose her now. We've kinder took to her, you see."

"I hardly think that will do," answered Aunt Abby, knowing as she did that the three *R*'s comprised the full extent of an education at the Corners. "What she needs is a chance to mingle with more people than she can here, and learn the ways of the world, as well as books. Her mind is bright. I notice she is reading every chance she can get, and you know my ideas about education. For her to stay here, even with schooling at the Corners, is to let her grow up like a hoyden. Now what would you think if I took her back to Christmas Cove? There is a better school there. She will meet and mingle with more people, and improve faster."

"I dunno what Judson'll say," returned Aunt

Mandy, somewhat sadly. "He's got so wonted to her, he'll be heart-broke, I'm afraid." And so the consultation closed.

The matter did not end here, for Aunt Abby, "sot in her way," as Uncle Jud had often said, yet in reality only advocating what she felt was best for this homeless waif, now began a persuasive campaign. She enlarged on Christmas Cove, its excellent school and capable master, its social advantages and cultured people, who boasted a public library and debating society, and especially its summer attractions, when a few dozen city people sojourned there. Its opportunities for church-going also came in for praise, though if this worthy woman had known how Chip felt about that feature, it would have been left unmentioned.

"The girl needs religious influence and contact with believers, as well as schooling," she said later on to Aunt Mandy, "and that must be considered. Here she can have none, and will grow up a heathen. I certainly think she ought to go back with me for a year or two, at least, and then we can decide what is best."

"Thar's one thing ye ain't thought 'bout," Mandy answered, "an' that's her sense o' obligation. From what she's told me, 'twas that that made her run

away from whar she was, 'n' she'd run away from here if she didn't feel she was earnin' her keep. She's peculiar in that way, 'n' can't stand feelin' she's dependent. How you goin' to get round that?"

"Just as you do," returned Aunt Abby, not at all discouraged. "We live about as you do, as you know, only Mr. Bemis has the mill; and she can help me about the house, as she does here."

But Chip's own consent to this new plan was the hardest to obtain.

"I'll do just as Uncle Jud wants me to," she responded, when Aunt Abby proposed the change; "but I'd hate to go 'way from here. It's all the real sort o' home I've ever known, and they've been so good to me I'll have to cry when I leave it. You'd let me come here once in a while, wouldn't ye?"

As she seemed ready to cry at this moment, Aunt Abby wisely dropped the subject then and there; in fact, she did not allude to it again in Chip's presence.

But Aunt Abby carried her point with the others. Uncle Jud consented very reluctantly, Aunt Mandy also yielded after much more persuasion, and when Aunt Abby's visit terminated, poor Chip's few belongings were packed in a new telescope case; she kissed Aunt Mandy, unable to speak, and this

tearful parting was repeated at the station with Uncle Jud. When the train had vanished he wiped his eyes on his coat sleeves, climbed into his old carryall, and drove away disconsolate.

"Curis, curis, how a gal like that 'un'll work her way into a man's feelin's," he said to himself. "It ain't been three months since I picked her up, 'n' now her goin' away seems like pullin' my heart out."

CHAPTER XXVIII

Christmas Cove had entered its autumn lethargy when Aunt Abby Bemis and her new protégée reached it. Captain Bemis, who "never had no say 'bout nothin'," but who had cooked his own meals uncomplainingly for three weeks, emerged, white-dusted, from the mill, to greet the arrivals, and Chip was soon installed in a somewhat bare room overlooking the cove. Everything seemed slightly chilly to her here. This room, with its four-poster bed, blue-painted chairs, light blue shades, and dark blue straw matting, the leafless elms in front, the breeze that swept in from the sea, and even her reception, seemed cool. Her heart was not in it. Try as she would, she could not yet feel one spark of affection for this "book-larned" Aunt Abby, who had already begun to reprove her for lapses of speech. It was all so different from the home life she had just left; and as Chip had now begun to notice and feel trifles, the relations of the people seemed as chilly as the room to which she was consigned.

When Sunday came — a sunless one with leaden

sky and cold wind bearing the ocean's moaning — Chip felt herself back at Greenvale with its Sundays, for now she was stared at the moment she entered the church. The singing was, of course, of the same solemn character, the minister's prayers even longer, and the preaching as incomprehensible as in Greenvale.

To Chip, doubtless a heretic who needed regeneration, it seemed a melancholy and solemn performance. The sermon (on predestination, with a finale which was a description of the resurrection day) made her feel creepy, and when the white-robed procession rising from countless graves was touched upon, and a pause came when she could hear the ocean's distant moan once more, it seemed that spites were creeping and crawling all about that dim room.

With her advent at school Monday came something of the same trouble first met at Greenvale, for the master, a weazen, dried-up little old man, who wore a wig and seemed to exude rules and discipline, lacked the kindly interest of Miss Phinney.

Chip, almost a mature young lady, was aligned with girls and boys of ten and twelve, and once more the same shame and humiliation had to be endured. It wore away in time, however, for she had made almost marvellous progress under Miss Phinney.

Her mind was keen and quick, and once at study again, she astonished Mr. Bell, the master.

Something of her old fearless self-reliance now came to her aid, also. It had made her dare sixty miles of wilderness alone and helpless, it had spurred her to escape Greenvale and her sense of being a dependent pauper, and now that latent force for good or ill still nerved her.

But Christmas Cove did not suit her. The sea that drew her eyes with its vastness seemed to awe her. The great house, brown and moss-coated, where she lived, was barnlike, and never quite warm enough. The long street she traversed four times daily was bleak and wind-swept. Aunt Abby was austere and lacking in cordiality; and Sundays — well, Sundays were Chip's one chief abhorrence.

She may be blamed for it, — doubtless will be, — and yet she never had been, and it seemed never would be, quite reconciled to Sundays. At Tim's Place they were unknown. At Greenvale they had been dreaded, and now at Christmas Cove they were no less so.

At Uncle Jud's, in Peaceful Valley, where she had found an asylum, loving care, and companionship akin to her, Sundays were only half-Sundays —

days of chore-doing, of reading, of rest, or long strolls along shady lanes with Uncle Jud, or following the brook and watching him fish. It was not right, maybe. It was somewhat of sacrilege, perhaps, this lazy, summer-day-strolling, flower-picking, berry-gathering way of passing them, and yet, as the months with Martin and his party in the wilderness where Sunday could not be observed, and those with Uncle Jud were all that Chip had really enjoyed, she must not be blamed.

Another influence — an insidious heart-hunger she could not put away — now added to her loneliness in the new life. It carried her thoughts back to the rippled, moonlit lake, where Ray had picked his banjo and sung to her; even back to that first night by the camp-fire when she had watched and listened to him in rapt admiration. It thrilled her as naught else could when she recalled the few moments at the lake when, unconscious of the need of restraint, she had let him caress her.

Then the long days of watching for his return were lived over, and the one almost ecstatic moment when he had leaped from the stage and over the wall, with no one in sight, while he held her in his arms.

And then — and this hurt the most — that last

evening before they were to part again, when beside the firefly-lit mill-pond he had the chance to say so much, and said — nothing!

It was all a bitter-sweet memory, which she tried to put away forever the night she left Greenvale. She was now Vera Raymond. No one could trace her; and yet, so at odds were her will and heart, there still lingered the faint hope that Ray would sometime and somehow find her out.

And so, studying faithfully, often lonesome, now and then longing for the bygone days with Ray and Old Cy, and always hoping that she might sometime return to Peaceful Valley, Chip passed the winter at Christmas Cove.

Something of success came to her through it all. She reached and retained head positions in her classes. A word of praise came occasionally from Mr. Bell. Aunt Abby grew less austere and seemed to have a little pride in her. She became acquainted with other people and in touch with young folks, was invited to parties and sleigh-rides. The vernacular of Tim's Place left her, and even Sundays were less a torture, in fact, almost pleasant, for then she saw most of the young folks she mingled with, and now and then exchanged a bit of gossip.

Her own dress became of more interest to her.

Aunt Abby, fortunately for Chip, felt desirous that her ward should appear well, and Chip, thus educated and polished in village life, to a degree, at least, fulfilled Aunt Abby's hopes.

Another success also came to her, for handsome as she undeniably was, with her big, appealing eyes, her splendid black hair, and well-rounded form, the young men began to seek her. One became persistent, and when spring had unlocked the long, curved bay once more, Chip had become almost a leader in the little circle of young people.

Her life with those who had taken her in charge also became more harmonious. In fact, something of affection began to leaven it, for the reason that never once had Aunt Abby questioned Chip as to her past. Aunt Mandy and Uncle Jud had both cautioned her as to its unwisdom, and she was broad and charitable enough to let it remain a closed book until such time as Chip was willing to open it; and for this, more than all else that she received, Chip felt grateful. But one day it came out — or at least a portion of it.

"I suppose you have often wondered where I was born, and who my parents were," Chip said, one Sunday afternoon, when she and Aunt Abby were

alone, "and I want to thank you for never, never asking." And then, omitting much, she briefly outlined her history.

"I was born close to the wilderness," she said, "and my mother died when I was about eight years old. Then my father took me into the woods, where I worked at a kind of a boarding house for lumbermen. I ran away from that when I was about sixteen. I had to; the reasons I don't want to tell. I found some people camping in the woods when I'd been gone three days and 'most starved. They felt pity for me, I guess, and took care of me. I stayed at their camp that summer, and then they fetched me home with them and I was sent to school. Somebody said something to me there, somebody who hated me. She had been pestering me all the time, and I ran away. Uncle Jud found me and took care of me until you came, and that's all I want to tell. I could tell a lot more, but I don't ever want these people to find me or take me back where they live, and that's why I don't tell where I came from. Then I felt I was so dependent on them — I was twitted of it — that it's another reason why I ran away. I wouldn't have stayed with Uncle Jud more than over night except I had a chance to work and earn my board."

"But wasn't it unkind of you — isn't it now — not to let these people know you are alive?" answered Aunt Abby. "They were certainly good to you."

"I know that they were," returned Chip, somewhat contritely; "but I couldn't stand being dependent on them any longer. If they found where I was, they'd come and fetch me back; and I'd feel so ashamed I couldn't look 'em in the face. I'd rather they'd think I was dead."

"Well, perhaps it is best you do not," returned Aunt Abby, sighing; "but years of doubt, and not knowing whether some one we care for is dead or alive, are hard to bear. And now that you have told me some of your history, I will tell you a life-long case of not knowing some one's fate. Many years ago my sister and myself, who were born here, became acquainted with two young men, sailor boys from Bayport, named Cyrus and Judson Walker. Cyrus became attached to me and we were engaged to marry. It never came to pass, however, for the ship that Judson was captain of, with Cyrus as first mate, foundered at sea. All hands took to the two boats. The one Judson was in was picked up, but the other was never heard of afterward. In due time Judson and my sister Amanda married. He

gave up a sailor's life, and they settled down where they now live. I waited many years, vainly hoping for my sweetheart's return, and finally, realizing that he must be dead, married Captain Bemis. That all happened so long ago that I do not care to count the years; and yet all through them has lingered that pitiful thread of doubt and uncertainty, that vain hope that somehow and someway Cyrus may have escaped death and may return. I know it will never happen. I know he is dead; and yet I cannot put away that faint hope and quite believe it is so, and never shall so long as I live. Now you have left those who must have cared something for you in much the same pitiful state of doubt, and it is not right."

For one moment something almost akin to horror flashed over Chip.

"And was he called — was he never — I mean this brother, ever heard from?" she stammered, recovering herself in time.

"Why, no," answered Aunt Abby, looking at her curiously, "of course not. Why, what ails you? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Oh, nothing," returned Chip, now more composed; "only the story and how strange it was."

It ended the conversation, for Chip, so over-

whelmed by the flood of possibilities contained in this story, dared not trust herself longer with Aunt Abby, and soon escaped to her room.

And now circumstances came trooping upon her: the shipwreck, which she had heard Old Cy describe so often; the name she knew was really his; the almost startling resemblance to Uncle Jud in speech, ways, and opinions; and countless other proofs. Surely it must be so. Surely Old Cy, of charming memory, and Uncle Jud no less so, must be brothers, and now it was in her power to — and then she paused, shocked at the position she faced.

She was now known as Vera Raymond, and respected; she had cut loose forever from the old shame of an outlaw's child; of a wretched drudge at Tim's Place; of being sold as a slave; and all that now made her blush.

And then Ray!

Full well she knew now what must have been in his heart that last evening and why he acted as he did. Hannah had told her the bitter truth, as she had since realized. Ray had been assured that she was an outcast, and despicable in the sight of Greenvale. He dared not say "I love you; be my wife." Instead, he had been hurried away to keep them apart; and as all this dire flood of shame that

had driven her from Greenvale surged in her heart, the bitter tears came.

In calmer moments, and when the heart-hunger controlled, she had hoped he might some day find her and some day say, "I love you." But now, so soon, to make herself known, to tell who she was, to admit to these new friends that she was Chip McGuire with all that went with it, to have to face and live down that shame, to admit that she had taken Ray's first name for her own — no, no, a thousand times no!

But what of Old Cy and Uncle Jud, and their life-long separation?

Truly her footsteps had led her to a parting of the ways, one sign-board lettered "Duty and Shame," the other a blank.

CHAPTER XXIX

"Good luck comes now 'n' then; bad luck drops 'round frequently." — OLD CY WALKER.

WHEN Old Cy emerged from the cave, his face glorified and heart throbbing with the blessings now his to give Chip, he looked about with almost fear. The two abandoned canoes and the trusty rifle had seemed an assurance of tragic import, and yet no proof of this outlaw's death. That this cave had been his lair, could not be doubted; and so momentous was this discovery, and so anxious was Old Cy to rescue this fortune, that he trembled with a sudden dread.

But no sign of human presence met his sweeping look.

The lake still rippled and smiled in the sunlight. Two deer, a buck and doe, were feeding on the rush-grown shore just across, while at his feet that rusty rifle still uttered its fatal message.

Once more Old Cy glanced all about, and then entered the cave again. Here, in the dim light and with trembling hands, he filled the cans once more,

and almost staggering, so faint was he from excitement, he hurried to the canoe, and packing them in its bow, covered the precious cargo with his blanket.

Then he ran like a deer back to the cave, closed it with the slab, grasped his rifle, and not even looking at the rusty one, bounded down the path to his canoe again, launched it, and pushed off.

Never before had it seemed so frail a craft. And now, as he swung its prow around toward the outlet, a curious object met his eyes.

Far up the lake, and where no ripple concealed it, lay what looked like a floating log, clasped by a human arm.

What intuition led him hither, Old Cy never could explain, for escape from the lake was now his sole thought. And yet, with one sweep of his paddle, he turned his canoe and sped across the lake. And now, as he neared this object, it slowly outlined itself, and he saw a grewsome sight, — two bloated corpses grasping one another as if in a death grapple. One had hair of bronze red, the other a hideously scarred face with lips drawn and teeth exposed.

Hate, Horror, and Death personified.

Only for a moment did Old Cy glance at this ghastly sight, and then he turned again and sped back across the lake.

The bright sun still smiled calm and serene, the morning breeze still kissed the blue water, the two deer still watched him with curious eyes; but he saw them not — only the winsome face and appealing eyes of Chip as he last beheld them.

And now in the prow of his canoe lay her fortune, her heritage, which was, after all, but scant return for all the shame and stigma so far meted out to her.

It was almost sunset ere Old Cy, his nerves still quivering and wearied as never before, crossed the little lake and breathed a sigh of heart-felt gratitude as he drew his canoe out on the sandy shore near the ice-house. No one was in sight, nor likely to be. A thin column of smoke rising from the cabin showed that the hermit was still on earth, and now for the first time, Old Cy sat down and considered his plans for the near future.

First and foremost, not a soul, not even his old trusted companion here, not even Martin, or Angie, and certainly not Ray, must learn what had now come into his possession. Neither must his journey to this far-off lake or aught he had learned there be disclosed.

But how was he to escape from the woods and these people, soon to arrive for their summer sojourn?

And what if Chip herself should come? Two conclusions forced themselves upon him now: first, he must so conceal the fortune that none of these friends even could suspect its presence; next, he must by some pretext leave here as soon as Martin and his party arrived, and cease not his watchful care until Chip's heritage was safe in some bank in her name.

And now, with so much of his future moves decided upon, he hurried to the cabin, greeted Amzi, urged him to hasten supper, and, securing a shovel, returned to his canoe.

In five minutes the cans of gold were buried deep in the sand, not two feet from where the half-breed had once landed, and upon Old Cy's person the bills found concealment. How much it all amounted to, he had not even guessed, nor scarce thought. To secure it and bear it safely away from this now almost accursed lake had been his sole thought, and must be until locks and bolts could guard it better. That night Old Cy hardly slept a moment.

And now began days of waiting and watching, the slow course of which he had never before known. He dared not leave the cabin except to fish close by and within sight of the one focal point of his interest.

Each midday, for not sooner would the expected ones be apt to arrive, he began to watch the lake's outlet, and ceased not this vigil until darkness came. A dozen times a day he covertly visited the ice-house to be certain no alien footprints had been stamped upon the sand near his buried treasure, and had the hermit been an alert and normal man, he must have noticed Old Cy's strange conduct.

This burden of care also began to haunt his sleep, and in it he saw the open cave, and himself watched by vicious, leering faces. Once he saw those ghastly corpses still clasped together, but hovering over him, and then awoke with a sense of horror.

A worse dream than this came later, for in it he saw the half-breed creeping along the lake's shore, and then, stooping where the gold was buried, he began to dig, at which Old Cy sprang from his bed in sudden terror.

"I'll go crazy if I don't git rid o' that money 'fore long," he said to himself; and the next day another place of concealment occurred to him.

There was, beneath the new cabin, a small cellar entered through a trap-door. It was some ten feet square, and had been used to store potatoes, pork, and the like. To carry out his new plan, which was to hide the gold in this cellar, it became necessary to

keep Amzi out of sight until its transfer was made. That was an easy task, for Amzi, docile as a child, was sent out on the lake to fish, and then Old Cy, hastily constructing a bag of deerskin, hurried to the beach, dug up the treasure, poured the glittering coin into this bag, hid it in the cellar, nailed the trap-door down, and that night slept better.

Two days after, just as the sun was nearing the mountain top, Martin, Angie, Levi, and Ray entered the lake.

How grateful both Old Cy and Amzi were for their arrival, how eagerly they grasped hands with them at the landing, and how like two boys Martin and Ray behaved needs no description.

All that had happened in Greenvale was soon told. Chip's conduct and progress were related by Angie. Ray's plans to remain here another winter were disclosed by him; and then, when the cheerful party had gathered about the evening fire, Martin touched upon another matter.

"I met Hersey as we were coming in," he said, "and he says that neither McGuire nor the half-breed has been seen or heard of since early last fall. Hersey came in early this spring with one of his deputies; they visited a half-dozen lumber camps, called twice at Tim's Place, and even went over to

Pete's cabin on the Fox Hole, but nowhere could they learn anything of these two men. More than that, no canoe was found at Pete's hut, and there was no sign of occupation at all this past winter. Nothing could be learned from Tim, either, although not much was expected from that source. It is all a most mysterious disappearance, and the last that we can learn of Pete was his arrival and departure from Tim's Place after we rescued Chip."

"I think both on 'em has concluded this section was gittin' too warm for 'em," remarked Levi, "an' they've lit out."

"It's good riddance if they have," answered Old Cy, "an' I'm sartin none on us'll ever set eyes on 'em agin."

And Old Cy spoke the truth, for none of this party ever did. In fact, no human being, except himself and Martin, ever learned the secret that this mountain-hid lake could tell.

But another matter now began to interest Old Cy — how Ray and Chip stood in their mutual feelings. That all was not as he wished, Old Cy soon guessed from Ray's face and actions, and he was not long in verifying it.

"Wal, how'd ye find the gal?" he said to Ray when the chance came. "Was she glad to see ye?"

"Why, yes," answered Ray, looking away, "she appeared to be. I wasn't in Greenvale but two weeks, you know."

"Saw her 'most every evenin' durin' that time, I s'pose?"

"No, not every one," returned Ray, vaguely; "her school hadn't closed when I got home, and she studied nights, you see."

Old Cy watched Ray's face for a moment.

"I ain't pryin' into yer love matters," he said at last, "but as I'm on your side, I'd sorter like to know how it's progressin'. Wa'n't thar nothin' said 'tween ye — no sort o' promise, 'fore ye come 'way?"

"No, nothing of that sort," answered Ray, looking confused, "though we parted good friends, and she sent her love to you. I'm afraid Chip don't quite like Greenvale."

Old Cy made no answer, though a smothered "hum, ha" escaped him at the disclosure of what he feared.

"I wish ye'd sorter clinched matters 'fore ye left," he said, after a pause; "that is, if ye're callatin' to be here 'nother winter. It's 'most too long to keep a gal guessin'; 'sides, 'tain't right."

Ray, however, made no defence, in fact, seemed guilty and confused, so Old Cy said no more.

A few days later he made a proposal that astonished Martin.

"I've been here now 'bout two years," he said, "an' I'm gittin' sorter oneasy. I callate ye kin spare me a couple o' weeks."

No intimation of his real errand escaped him, and so adroitly had he laid his plans and timed his movements, that when his canoe was packed and he bade them good-bye, no one suspected how valuable a cargo it carried.

But Old Cy was more than "sorter oneasy," for the only spot where he dared close his eyes in sleep during that three days' journey out of the wilderness was in his canoe, with his head pillowed on that precious gold.

CHAPTER XXX

"A miser was created to prove how little real comfort kin be got out o' money."—OLD CY WALKER.

WHEN Old Cy joined the little party at the lake again, he seemed to have aged years. His sunny smile was gone. He looked weary, worn, and disconsolate.

"Chip's run away from Greenvale," he said simply, "an' nobody can find hide nor hair on her. They've follered the roads for miles in every direction. Nobody can be found that's seen anybody like her 'n' they've even dragged the mill-pond. She left a note chargin' it to that durn fool, Hannah, and things she said, which I guess was true. I'd like to duck her in the hoss-pond!"

Such news was like a bombshell in the camp, or if not, what soon followed was, for after a few days Old Cy made another announcement which upset the entire party.

"I think I'd best go back to Greenvale," he said, "an' begin a sarch for that gal. I ain't got nobody in the world that needs me so much, or I

them. I'm a sorter outcast myself, ez you folks know. That little gal hez crept into my heart so, I can't take no more comfort here. Amzi don't need me so much as I need her, 'n' I've made up my mind I'll start trampin' till I find her. I've a notion, too, she'll head for the wilderness ag'in, 'n' I'm most sartin she'll fetch up whar her mother was buried. I watched that gal middlin' clus all last summer. She's true blue 'n' good grit. She won't do no fool thing, like makin' 'way with herself, 'n' I'll find her somewhar arnin' her own livin' if I live long 'nuff. From the note she left, I know that was in her mind."

Martin realized that there was no use in trying to change Old Cy's intent — in fact, had no heart to do so, for he too felt much the same toward Chip.

"I'll give you all the funds you need, old friend," he made answer, "and wish you God-speed on your mission. I'll do more than that even. I'll pay some one to watch at Grindstone for the next year, so if Chip reaches there, we can learn it."

That night he held a consultation with his wife.

"I suspect we are somewhat to blame for this

unfortunate happening," he said to her, "or, at least, some thoughtless admissions you may have made led up to it. It's a matter we are responsible for, or I feel so, anyway. I think as Old Cy does, that this girl must be found if money can do it, and I propose that we break camp and return to Greenvale. If Amzi can't be coaxed to go along, I must leave Levi with him. No power on earth can keep Old Cy here any longer."

But the old hermit had changed somewhat since that night he broke away and returned to this camp, and when the alternative of remaining here alone, or going out with them all, was presented, he soon yielded.

"If Cyrus is goin', I'll have to," he said. "I'd be lonesome without him." And to this assertion he adhered.

Ray, however, was the most dejected and unhappy one now here, though fortunately Old Cy was the only one who understood why, and he kept silent.

Old Cy's defection had influenced all alike, and wood life was no longer attractive. It was a pity, in a way, for no more charming spot than this sequestered lake could be found. The trout leaping or breaking its glassy surface night and morn-

ing seemed to almost urge an angler; not an hour in all the day but two to a dozen deer might be seen along its shore, and blueberries were ripening over in the "blow down." Amzi's garden, now doubled in size, was well along, and it seemed a sin to leave so many attractions.

But Martin had lost heart for these allurements. The thought of poor, homeless Chip begging her way somewhere, spoiled it all. Conscious that her own neglect might have invited this calamity, Angie was almost heart-broken, and it was a saddened party that closed and barred the new cabin and left this rippled lake one morning.

They were even more sad when Aunt Comfort showed them Chip's message, and Angie read it with brimming eyes.

And now came Old Cy's departure, on a quest as hopeless as that of the Wandering Jew and as pathetic as the Ancient Mariner's.

But the climax was reached when Old Cy gave Martin his parting message and charge: —

"Here's a bank book," he said, "that calls fer 'bout sixty thousand dollars. It's the savin's o' McGuire, 'n' belongs to Chip. I found the cave whar 'twas hid. I found McGuire 'n' the half-breed, both dead 'n' floatin' in the lake clus by,

an' 'twas to keer fer this money I quit ye three weeks ago.

"If I never come back here, — an' I never shall 'thout I find Chip, — keep it fer her. Sometime she may show up. If ever she does, tell her Old Cy did all he could fer her."

CHAPTER XXXI

"Those who hev nothin' but a stiddy faith the Lord'll provide, never git fat." — OLD CY WALKER.

LIFE at Peaceful Valley and the home of Judson Walker fell into its usual monotony after Chip's departure.

Each day Uncle Jud went about his chores and his crop-gathering and watched the leaves grow scarlet, then brown, and finally go eddying up and down the valley, or heap themselves into every nook and cranny for final sleep.

Existence had become something like this to him, but he could no longer anticipate a vernal budding forth as the leaves came, but only the sear and autumn for himself, with the small and sadly neglected churchyard at the Corners for its ending.

Snow came and piled itself into fantastic drifts. The stream's summer chatter was hushed. The cows, chickens, and his horse, with wood-cutting, became his sole care. Once a week he journeyed to the Corners for his weekly paper and Mandy's

errands, always hoping for a message from Chip. Now and then one came, a little missive in angular chirography, telling how she longed to return to them, which they read and reread by candlelight.

Somehow this strange wanderer, this unaccounted-for waif, had crept into his life and love as a flower would, and "Pattycake," as he had named her, with her appealing eyes and odd ways, was never out of his thoughts.

And so the winter dragged its slow, chill course. Spring finally unlocked the brook once more, the apple and cherry blossoms came, the robins began nest-building, and one day Uncle Jud returned from the corner with a glad smile on his face.

"Pattycake's school's goin' to close in a couple o' weeks more, 'n' then she's comin' home," he announced, and Aunt Mandy, her face beaming, made haste to wipe her "specs" and read the joyous tidings.

For a few days Uncle Jud acted as if he had forgotten something and knew not where to look for it. He lingered about the house when he would naturally be at work. He peered into one room and then another, in an abstracted way, and finally Aunt Mandy caught him in the keeping room,

with one curtain raised, — a thing unheard of, — seated in one of the haircloth chairs and looking around.

"Mandy," he said, as she entered, "do you know, I think them picturs we've had hangin' here nigh on to forty year is homely 'nuff to stop a horse, 'n' they make me feel like I'd been to a funeral. Thar's that 'Death Bed o' Dan'l Webster,' an' 'Death o' Montcalm,' 'specially. I jest can't stand 'em no longer, an' 'The Father o' his Country.' I'm gittin' tired o' that, 'n' the smirk he's got on his face. I feel jest as though I'd like to throw a stun at him this minute. You may feel sot on them picturs, but I'd like to chuck the hull kit 'n' boodle into the cow shed. An' them winder curtains," he continued, looking around, "things so blue they make me shiver, an' this carpet with the figgers o' green and yaller birds, it sorter stuns me.

"Now Pattycake's comin' purty soon. She must 'a' seen more cheerful keepin' rooms'n ourn, 'n' I'm callatin' we'd best rip this 'un all up an' fix it new. Then thar's the front chamber — in fact, both on 'em — with the yaller spindle beds 'n' blue curtains, an' only a square of rag carpet front o' the dressers. Say, Mandy," he continued,

looking around once more, "how'd we ever happen to git so many blue curtains?"

His discontent with their home now took shape in vigorous action, and Aunt Mandy came to share it. Trip after trip to the Riggsville store was made. Two new chamber sets and rolls of carpeting arrived at the station six miles away, and came up the valley. A paper-hanger was engaged and kept busy for ten days. The death-bed pictures were literally kicked into the cow shed, and in three weeks four rooms had been so reconstructed and fitted anew that no one would recognize them.

Meanwhile Uncle Jud had utterly neglected his "craps," while he worked around the house. The wide lawn had been clipped close. A new picket fence, painted white, replaced the leaning, zigzag one around the garden. Weeds and brush disappeared, and only Aunt Mandy's protest saved the picturesque brown house from a coat of paint.

And then "Pattycake" arrived.

Nearly a year before she had been brought here, a weary, bedraggled, dusty, half-starved waif. Now Uncle Jud met her at the station, his face shining; Aunt Mandy clasped her close to her portly person; and as Chip looked around and

saw what had been done in her honor and to make her welcome, her eyes filled.

"I never thought anybody would care for me like this," she exclaimed, and then glancing at Uncle Jud, her eyes alight, she threw her arms about his neck and, for the first time, kissed him.

And never in all his life had he felt more amply paid for anything he had done.

Then and there, Chip resolved to do something that now lay in her power — to face shame and humbled pride and all the sacrifice it meant to her in the end, and reunite these two long-separated brothers. But not now, no, not yet.

Before her lay two golden joyous summer months. Aunt Abby was coming up later. She could not face her own humiliation now. She must wait until these happy days were past, then tell her wretched story, not sparing herself one iota, and then, if she must, go her way, an outcast into the world once more.

How utterly wrong she was in this conclusion, and how little she understood the broad charity of Uncle Jud, need not be explained. She was only a child as yet in all but stature. The one most bitter sneer of malicious Hannah still rankled and poisoned her common sense. Its effect upon

Chip had been as usual on her nature and belief, and this waif of the wilderness, this gnome child, must not be judged by ordinary standards. Like reflections from grotesque mirrors, so had her ideas of right and duty been distorted by eerie influences and weird surroundings. There was first the unspeakable brutality of her father; then the menial years at Tim's Place, with no more consideration than a horse or pig received, her only education being the uncanny teachings of Old Tomah. Under this baleful tuition, coupled with the ever present menace and mystery of a vast wilderness, she passed from childhood into womanhood, with the fixed belief that human kind were no better than brutes; that the forest was peopled by a nether world of spites, the shadowy forms of both man and beast; and worse than this, that all thought and action here must be the selfish ones of personal gain and personal protection. Like a dog forever expecting a blow, like any dumb brute ever on guard against superior force, so had Chip grown to maturity, a cringing, helpless, almost hopeless creature, and yet one whose inborn impulses and desires revolted at her surroundings.

Once removed from these, however, and in a

purer atmosphere, she was like one born again. Her past impressions still remained, her queer belief of present and future conditions was still a motive force, and the cringing, blow-expecting nature was yet hers.

For this reason, and because this new world and these new people were so unaccountable and quite beyond her ken in tender influence and loving care, what they had done and for what purpose seemed all the more impressive. But it was in no wise wasted; instead, it was like God-given sunshine to a flower that has never known aught except the chilling shadow of a dense forest.

And now ensued an almost pathetic play of interest, for Chip set herself about the duty of giving instead of obtaining pleasure.

She became what she was at Tim's Place, — a menial, so far as they would let her, — and from early morning until bedtime, some step, some duty, some kindly care for her benefactors, was assumed by her. She worked and weeded in the garden, she drove and milked the cows, she followed Uncle Jud to the hay-field, insisting that she must help, until at last he protested.

"I like ye 'round me all the time, girlie," he assured her, "for ye're the best o' company, 'n'

I'd rather see yer face'n' any posy that ever grew. But you've got to quit workin' so much in the sun. 'Twill get yer hands all calloused 'n' face freckled, an' I won't have it. I want ye to injie yourself, read books, pick flowers, 'n' sit in the shade. I see ye've got into the habit o' workin', which ain't a bad 'un, but thar ain't no need on't here."

One day a stranger happened up this valley, so seldom travelled that its roadway ruts were obscured by grass. Chip noticed him that morning where the brook curved almost to the garden, a fair-haired young man with jaunty straw hat, delicate, shining rod, and new fish basket. He was garbed in a spick-span brown linen suit. He saw her also, looking over the garden wall, and raising his hat gracefully, strode on.

His appearance, so neat and dainty and so like pictures of fishermen in books, his courteous manner of touching his hat, without a rude stare or even a second glance at her, caught her attention, and she watched him a few moments.

He did not look back until he had cast his line into a few eddies some twenty rods away; and then he turned, looked at her, the house, barns, garden, all as one picture, and then continued up the brook.

He was not seen again until almost twilight by her, and then he and Uncle Jud entered the sitting room.

"This is Mr. Goodnow, Mandy," Uncle Jud explained, nodding to the newcomer and glancing at Aunt Mandy and Chip. "He says he follered the brook further up'n he figgered on. It's four miles to the Corners, 'n' he wants us to keep him over night. I 'lowed we could, if you was willin'."

"I shall be most grateful if you kind ladies will permit my intrusion," the stranger added. "I have been so captivated by this delightful brook that I quite forgot where I was or the distance to the village until I saw that the sun was setting. If you can take care of me until morning, any payment you will accept shall be yours."

"I guess we can 'commodate ye," responded Aunt Mandy, pleasantly. And so this modern Don Juan found lodgement in the home of these people.

"I am an enthusiast on trout-catching," he explained, after all had gathered on the vine-enclosed porch and he had presented Uncle Jud with an excellent cigar. "About all I do summers is to hunt for brooks. I came to the village below here yesterday, having heard of this stream, and never before have I found one quite so attractive."

Then followed a more or less fictitious account of his own station and occupation in life, all very plausible, entirely frank, and quite convincing.

"I am unfortunate in one respect," he said, "in that I have no fixed occupation. My father, now dead, was a prominent physician. I was educated for the same profession and had just begun its practice when he died. An uncle also left me a large bequest at about the same time. My mother insisted that I give up practice, and now I am an enforced idler."

He was such an entirely new specimen of manhood, so charming of manner, so smooth of speech, that Chip watched and listened while he talked on and on, quite enthralled. She had seen similar gentlemen pass and repass Tim's Place, not quite so dainty and suave, perhaps, but dressed much the same. She had now and then noticed a pictured reproduction of one in some magazine. Insensibly, she compared this Mr. Goodnow with Ray, to the latter's discredit, and when the evening was ended and she was alone in her room, this new arrival's delicately chiselled face, smiling blue eyes, slightly curled mustache, and refined manners followed her.

"He's a purty slick talker," Uncle Jud admitted

to his wife later on, "a sorter chinaware, picturbook feller 'thout much harm in him. I kinder felt sorry for him, so I 'lowed we'd keep him over night. Guess he ain't much use in the world."

How little use and how much harm he was capable of may be gleaned from a brief résumé of this stranger's history.

He was, as he stated, without occupation and with plenty of money. He also, as stated, loved trout brooks and wildwood life — not wildwood life in its true sense, but the summer-day kind, where, clad as he was, he could follow some meadow brook or sit in the shade and watch it while indulging in day-dreams and smoking. He loved these things, but he loved fair ladies — collectively — still more. He had stumbled upon Peaceful Valley by accident, coming to it from a fashionable resort to escape an intrigue with a foolish *grande dame* and consequent irate husband. Chip's face and form had caught his eyes as he strolled by that day, and admission to the home of Uncle Jud and opportunity to meet, and, if possible, impress this handsome country lass, had been a matter of shrewd calculation with him. He had purposely remained up the brook until nightfall. He watched for and intercepted Uncle Jud

in the nick of time, persuaded that confiding man that he was too tired to reach the village, and with all the blandishments of speech at his command, had obtained entry to this home.

But he failed to impress Chip as he had hoped. She was no fool, if she had been reared at Tim's Place. A certain shiftiness in his eyes when he looked at her, a covert, sideways glance, never firm but ever elusive, was soon noted and awoke her suspicion. Then the glib story he had told of himself was soon contradicted by him in a few minor details. Like all liars, he lacked a perfect memory, and, talking freely, he occasionally crossed his own tracks.

Unfortunately for him, he also showed more interest in her than in the brook the next day, and the following one he capped the climax by asking her to go fishing with him — an invitation which she promptly refused.

"I don't like that Mr. Goodnow," she asserted to Uncle Jud a little later. "I think he's a deceitful man. He pesters me every chance he can, and I wish he'd go away."

That was enough for Uncle Jud, and after supper he harnessed his horse and politely but firmly requested Mr. Goodnow's company to the village.

CHAPTER XXXII

For many weeks now Chip had suffered from a troubled conscience, and, like most of us, was unable to face its consequences and admit her sin.

Time and again she had planned how she could best evade it and yet bring those two brothers together without first confessing. Old Cy must be told, of course. She could explain her conduct to him. He would surely forgive her, she thought, and then, maybe, find another home for her somehow and somewhere. Oversensitive as she was, to now confess her cowardly concealment and her deception of those who had loved and trusted her, seemed horrible.

But events were stronger than her will, for one day in the last of August, Uncle Jud returned from the village store, bringing dress materials and startling information. "Cap'n Bemis is failin' purty fast," he said, "so Aunt Abby writes, an' she ain't comin' up here. It won't make no difference to you, girlie," he continued, turning to Chip.

"I've brought home stuff to rig ye out fer school. Miss Solon the dressmaker's comin' to-morrer, 'n' we'll take keer o' ye in good shape. We've made up our minds ye belong to us fer good, me 'n' Mandy," he added, smiling at Chip, "an' I shall go with ye to Christmas Cove, if Cap'n Bemis ain't improvin', 'n' find ye a boardin' place."

"I'm awful sorry to hear 'bout the Cap'n," interrupted Aunt Mandy, as if the other matter and Chip's future were settled definitely; "but if he drops off, Aunt Abby must come here fer good. I dunno but it'll be a relief," she added, looking at Uncle Jud and sighing. "'Twa'n't no love-match in the first place, 'n' Abby's mind's always been sot on your brother Cyrus, 'n' she never quite gin up the idee he was alive."

And now a sudden faintness came to Chip as the chasm in her own life was thus opened. Only one instant she faltered, and then her defiant courage rose supreme and she took the plunge.

"Oh, your brother Cyrus isn't dead, Uncle Jud," she exclaimed, "he's alive and I know him. I've known it all summer and dare not tell because I'm a miserable coward and couldn't own up that I lied to you. My name isn't Raymond, it's McGuire; and my father was a murderer, and I'm

"Quit takin' on so, girlie," he said.

nobody and fit for nobody. I know you'll all despise me now and I deserve it. I'm willing to go away, though," and the next instant she was kneeling before Uncle Jud and sobbing.

It had all come in a brief torrent of pitiful confession which few would be brave enough to make.

To Chip, seeing herself as she did, it meant loss of love, home, respect, and all else she now valued, and that she must become a homeless wanderer once more.

But Uncle Jud thought otherwise, for now he drew the sobbing girl into his lap.

"Quit takin' on so, girlie," he said, choking back a lump; "why, we'll all love ye ten times more fer all this, an' ez fer bein' a nobody, ye're a blessed angel to us fer bringin' the news ye hev." And then he kissed her, while Aunt Mandy wiped her eyes on her apron.

The shower, violent for a moment, was soon over; for as Chip raised her wet eyes, a sunshiny smile illumined Uncle Jud's face.

"If Cyrus is alive," he said, "as ye callate, I'll thank God till I set eyes on him, and then I think I'll lick him fer not huntin' me up all these years."

"But mebbe he found Abby was married 'n'

didn't want to," interposed Aunt Mandy. "We mustn't judge him yet."

"No, I won't judge him," asserted Uncle Jud; "I'll jest cuff him, good 'n' hard, an' let it go at that.

"Ez fer you, girlie, an' jest to set yer mind at rest, we found out what your right name was and where ye run away from last fall, but never let on to nobody. 'Twas your business and nobody else's, an' made no difference in our feelin's, ez ye must see; an' now I'll tell ye how I found out.

"I was down to the Corners one day arter ye went to Christmas Cove, 'n' a feller — nice-lookin' feller, too, with honest brown eyes — was askin' if anybody had seen or heard o' a runaway girl by the name o' McGuire. Said she'd run away from Greenvale — 'That's 'bout a hundred miles from here,' he said — an' he was huntin' for her. Nobody at the Corners knew about ye 'n' I kept still, believin' ye had reason fer not wantin' to be found out."

And now another tide — the thrill of love — surged in Chip's heart, and her face became glorified.

And so the clouds rolled away. That night Chip wrote a brief but curious letter, so odd, in fact, it must be quoted verbatim: —

"Mr. Martin Frisbie,

"Please send word at once to Mr. Cyrus Walker that his brother Judson, who lives in Riggsville, wants to see him. No one else must be told of this, for it's a secret.

"One who Knows."

But Chip's secret was a most transparent one, for when this missive reached Martin three days later, he recognized its angular penmanship and similarity to the note Aunt Comfort still treasured, and knew that Chip wrote it.

It startled him somewhat, however, for Old Cy's youthful history was unknown to him, and suspecting that some mystery lay beneath this information, he told no one, but started for Riggsville at once.

The tide of emotion that had upset the even tenor of Uncle Jud's home life slowly ebbed away, and a keen sense of expectancy took its place.

Chip, after giving him her letter, explained that Old Cy was most likely in the wilderness, and that the letter might not reach him for weeks.

And then one day a broad-shouldered, rather commanding, and somewhat citified man drove up to the home of Uncle Jud.

"Does Mr. Judson Walker live here?" he inquired of Aunt Mandy, who met him at the door.

Her admission of that fact was scarce uttered when there came a rustling of skirts, a "Why, Mr. Frisbie!" and Chip was beside her, at which Martin, collected man of the world that he was, felt an unusual heart-throb of thankfulness.

A little later, when Uncle Jud had been summoned into their newly furnished "keeping room," disclosures astonishing to all followed.

"We have been searching for you, Chip, far and near," Martin assured them, "and Old Cy is still at it. He left us at the camp, almost a year ago, came to Greenvale, found you had run away, and came back to tell us. It upset us all so that we broke camp at once, taking Amzi with us, and returned to Greenvale. Old Cy there bade us good-bye and started to find you. Ray also began a search as well. I've advertised in dozens of papers, have kept Levi on watch for you at Grindstone ever since, and now I hope you will return with me to Greenvale."

"I thank you all, oh, so much," answered Chip, scared a little at this proposal, "but I don't want to. I'm nobody there and never can be. I'd be ashamed to face folks there any more."

"I guess she best stay with us," put in Uncle Jud, "fer we sorter 'dopted her, 'n' not meanin' no disrespect to you folks, I callate she'll be more content here. I'd like ye to get word to Cyrus, though, soon's possible. I hain't sot eyes on him fer forty years, 'n'," his eyes twinkling, "I'm jest spilin' to pull his hair 'n' cuff him."

"I will help out in that matter at once, and more than gladly," replied Martin, again looking at Chip and noting how improved she was; "but I still think Miss Runaway had better return with me. We need you, Chip," he continued earnestly, "and so does some else I can name, more than you imagine, I fancy, and my wife will welcome you with open arms, you may be sure. As for that foolish Hannah, she's the most penitent person in Greenvale. There's another reason still," he added, glancing around with a smile, "and no one is more glad of it than we all are. It's a sixty-thousand-dollar reason — your heritage, Miss Vera McGuire, for your father is dead, and that amount is now in the Riverton Savings Bank awaiting you."

Martin had expected this news to be overpowering, and a "Good God!" from Uncle Jud, and a gasping "Land sakes!" from Aunt Mandy, proved that it was.

Chip's face, however, was a study. First she grew pale, then flashed a scared glance from one to another of the three who watched her, and then almost did her shame and hatred of this vile parent find expression.

"I'm glad he — no, I won't say so, for he was my father," she exclaimed; "but I want Old Cy to have some of the money, and Uncle Jud here, and you folks, all. I was a pauper long enough," and then, true to her instinct of how to escape from trouble, she ran out of the room.

"She's a curis gal," asserted Uncle Jud, looking after her as if feeling that she needed explanation, "the most curis gal I ever saw. But we can't let her go, money or no money, Mr. Frisbie. I found her one night upon top o' Bangall Hill. She was so starved an' beat out from trampin' she couldn't hardly crawl up on to the wagon, 'n' yet she said she wouldn't be helped 'thout she could arn it. I think she's like folks we read about, who starve ruther'n beg. But she kin have all we've got some day, an' we jest can't let her go."

And Martin, realizing its futility, made no further protest.

Something of chagrin also came to him, for, broad-minded as he was, he realized how partial

neglect, the narrow religious prejudice of Greenvale, and unwise notice of her childish ideas about spites and Old Tomah's superstitions had all conspired to drive her away. She was honest and self-respecting, "true blue," as Old Cy had said, grateful as a fawning dog for all that had been done for her, and in spite of her origin, a circumstance that carried no weight with Martin, she was one, he believed, who would develop into splendid womanhood. That she was well on her way toward that goal, her improved speech and devotion to these new friends gave ample evidence.

And now Ray's position in this complex situation occurred to Martin; for this young man's interest in Chip and almost heart-broken grief over her disappearance had long since betrayed his attachment.

"I suppose you may have guessed that there was a love-affair mixed up with this episode," he said to the two somewhat dazed people.

"I callated thar was, that fust night," Uncle Jud responded, his eyes twinkling again, "an' told Mandy so. 'Twas that more'n anything else kept us from quizzin' the gal. I knowed by her face she had heart trouble, 'n' I've seen the cause on't."

"You have," exclaimed Martin, astonished in turn, "for Heaven's sake, where?"

"Oh, down to the Corners, 'most a year ago, 'n' a likely boy he was, too."

"And never told her?"

"No, why should I, thinkin' she'd run away from him. We didn't want to spile her plans. We found out, though, her name was McGuire, but never let on till she told us a spell ago." And then Uncle Jud told the story of Ray's arrival in Riggsville in search of Chip.

"That fellow is my nephew, Raymond Stetson," rejoined Martin with pride, "he also is an orphan, and I have adopted him. Chip has no cause to be ashamed of his attachment."

"I don't callate she is," replied Uncle Jud. "'Tain't that that jinerally makes a gal kick over the traces. Mebbe 'twas suthin some o' you folks said." And then a new light came to Martin.

"Mr. Walker," he answered impressively, "in every village there is always a meddlesome old maid who invariably says things she'd better not, and ours is no exception. In this case it was a dependent of our family who took a dislike to Chip, it seems, and her escapade was its outcome."

"Wal, ye've got to hev charity for 'em," replied Uncle Jud with a broad smile. "Never havin' suffered the joys 'n' sorrows o' love, they look at it

sorter criss-cross, an' mebbe this 'un did. Old maids are a good deal like cider — nat'raly turn into vinegar. What wimmin need more'n all the rest is bein' loved, 'n' if they don't get it, they sour up in time an' ain't no comfort to themselves nor nobody else. Then ag'in, not havin' no man nor no babies to look arter, they take to coddlin' cats 'n' dogs 'n' parrots, which ain't nat'ral."

"I think," continued Uncle Jud, "now that we've turned another furrow, you'd best stop a day or two with us, 'n' sorter git 'quainted. We'll be mighty glad to hev ye, me an' Mandy, an' then ag'in thar's a lot o' good trout holes up the brook. We hev plenty to eat, 'n' mebbe a few days here in Peaceful Valley'll sorter reconcile ye to leavin' the gal with us." And nothing loath, Martin accepted.

Aunt Mandy and Chip now bestirred themselves as never before. The dressmaker was left to her own resources, Martin and Uncle Jud rigged fish-poles and started for the brook. Chip, with pail in hand, hurried away to the fields, and when tea-time arrived, the big platter of crisp fried trout, saucers filled with luscious blackberries, and ample shortcake of the same with cream that poured in clots, assured Martin that these people did indeed have plenty to eat.

"How did this come to be named Peaceful Valley?" he queried, when they had all gathered around the table. "It's very appropriate."

"Wal," answered Uncle Jud, "we got it from a feller that come up here paintin' picturs one summer, an'," chuckling, "'twas all we got for a month's board, at that. He was a sort o' skimpy critter, with long hair, kinder pale, and chawed tobacco stiddy. He 'lowed his name was Grahame, that he was in the show business 'n' gittin' backgrounds, as he called 'em, fer show picturs. He roved up 'n' down the brook, puttin' rocks 'n' trees 'n' waterfalls on paper, allus gittin' 'round reg'lar 'bout meal-time — must 'a' gained twenty pounds while here. An' then one mornin' he was missin', 'n' so was Aunt Mandy's gold thimble 'n' all her silver spoons. She'd sorter took to him, too, he was that palaverin' in his way."

There now ensued a series a questions from Uncle Jud in regard to Old Cy — how long Martin had known him, and all that pertained to his history.

It was gladly recited by Martin, together with all the strange happenings in the wilderness, the finding of Chip, the half-breed's pursuit and abduction of her, and much else that has been told.

It was almost midnight ere Martin was shown to

the best front chamber, and even then he lay awake an hour, listening to the steady prattle of a near-by brook and thinking of all that had happened.

A tone of regret crept into his voice, however, when, after thanking Uncle Jud and Aunt Mandy, and bidding them good-bye, he addressed Chip.

"I wish I could take you back with me," he said, "your return would be such a blessing to Aunt Comfort and my wife. You may not believe it, but you are dear to them both. I must insist that you at least pay us a visit soon. Here is your bank book," he added, presenting it. "You are rich now, or at least need never want, for which we are all grateful. And what about Ray?" he added, pausing to watch her. "What shall I say to him? Shall I tell him to come and see you?"

Chip shook her head firmly. "No, no," she answered, "please don't do that. Some day I may feel different, but not now."

CHAPTER XXXIII

SAD news arrived in Peaceful Valley a week later, for Captain Bemis had passed on, Aunt Abby was in lonely sorrow, and wrote for Chip to come at once.

Her fate was now linked with these people. Aunt Abby had been kind and helpful, and Chip, more than glad to return a little of the obligation, hurried to Christmas Cove.

It was a solemn and silent house she now entered. Aunt Abby, despite the fact that it was not a love-match, mourned her departed companion. The mill's pertinent silence added gloom, and Chip's smiling face and affectionate interest was more than welcome to Aunt Abby.

And now that concealment was no longer needed, Chip hastened to tell her story in full.

How utterly Aunt Abby was astonished, how breathlessly she listened to Chip's recital, and how, when the climax came and Chip assured her that good Old Cy Walker was still alive, Aunt Abby collapsed entirely, sobbing and thanking God all at once, is but a sidelight on this tale.

"I couldn't tell you before," Chip assured her, while her own tears still flowed. "I was so ashamed and guilty all in one, I couldn't bear to. I never did so mean a thing in all my life, and never will again. But when Uncle Jud told me what you didn't, and how much he cared for me, and how you once cared for Uncle Cy, I went all to pieces and told the whole story and sent word to Uncle Cy that day. I feel so guilty now, and so mean, I don't see how you can forgive me."

But Aunt Abby's forgiveness was not slow in coming. The past ten days of sorrow had left her heart very tender. In spite of being "book-larned," she was very humane. Chip's sad life and misfortunes appealed to her, as they had to Uncle Jud, and true Christian woman that she was, her heart opened to Chip.

"I hope we shall never be parted while I live," she said, as the tears came again. "I have no children, and no one to live for but my sister. I am so wonted to Christmas Cove, I could not feel at home anywhere else. If Uncle Jud will consent, I will adopt you legally, and when I am laid away, all I have shall be yours."

And so Chip McGuire, waif of the wilderness, child of an outlaw, once sold to a human brute, yet

fighting her way upward and onward to a better life, despite every drawback, now found a home and mother.

No light of education had illumined her pathway, no Christian teaching and no home example, only the inborn and God-given impulse of purity, self-respect, and gratitude; and yet, like a bud forcing its way up out of a muck heap and into the sunshine, so Chip had emerged to win respect and love.

But all her history is not told yet. She still lacked even a common education. There was still an old man seeking to find her, who was yet wandering afar. A homeless, almost friendless old man was he, whose life had gone amiss, and whose sole ambition was to do for her and find content in her happiness. A wanderer and recluse for many years, he was still more so now, and out of place as well among the busy haunts of men. More than that, he was an object of curiosity to all grown people and the jest of the young, as he tramped up and down the land in search of Chip.

And what a pitiful quest it was, — this asking the same question thousands of times, this lingering in towns to watch mill operatives file out, this peering into stores and marts, to go on again, and repeat it for months and months.

There was still another link in this chain, — a boy, so far as experience goes, who was only deterred from unwise haste by a cool-headed man.

"You had better not go to Chip now," Martin said to him on his return from Peaceful Valley. "She is an odd child of nature, and you won't lose by waiting. My advice to you is to forget her for the present, find some profitable occupation, and then, when you have made a little advancement in life, go and woo her if you can. To try it now is foolish."

It was cold comfort for Ray.

One of Chip's first acts of emancipation was to write to Aunt Comfort and Angie, assuring both of her love and best wishes, and thanking them for all they had done. Both letters were cramped in chirography but correct in spelling, and in Angie's was a note for Martin, asking that he draw one hundred dollars of her money and send it to her, and as much more to pay some one to follow Old Cy. The latter request Martin ignored, however, for he had already set the machinery of newspaperdom at work, and an advertisement for information of that wanderer was flying far and wide.

Of the money sent her, Chip made odd and quite characteristic uses, only one of which needs mention,

— the purchase of a banjo. Had Ray known this, and that the tender memory it invoked was the reason for this investment, he would have had less cause for grief. But Ray did not, which was all the better for him.

And now, while she is in good company at Christmas Cove, with Mr. Bell, syntax, decimal fractions, the planetary system, and divisions of the earth six hours of each school day, or with Aunt Abby sewing, or picking at the banjo, or attending church, we must leave Chip and follow Old Cy.

With a hunter's instinct he had calculated that Chip would head for the place of her birth, and then, if possible, send word to either himself or the Indian. That she had made way with herself he did not consider probable. She was not of that fibre, he felt positive; but instead, would make her own way across country, working, if need be, to obtain food and shelter until she at last reached the one spot nearest her heart, — her mother's grave.

Believing this of her, and judging rightly, he left Greenvale, and, as it happened, twice crossed and once followed the very route she had taken for miles. That he failed to hear of her from the many he asked was solely due to accident, added to her own caution in avoiding all observant eyes.

And what an almost hopeless and interminable tramp he took! Back and forth across the section of country she was likely to follow for weeks and weeks, halting a day in every village and two or three in each city, asking the same question over and over again, until his indomitable courage and almost deathless faith slowly ebbed away.

Autumn came, the leaves grew scarlet and brown, snow followed, and winter locked all streams, and still Old Cy journeyed on. Spring and sunshine once more warmed the earth into life, the fields grew green, and yet he paused not.

With June and the real beginning of summer, however, came a new inspiration, which was to go at once by rail and stage to Chip's native town and learn if, perchance, she, or any news of her, had reached this village.

Another thought also came with this, — that Martin might soon again visit the woods and perhaps he could intercept him.

A little satisfaction was obtained by this advance move, for when this village was reached, Levi was found waiting.

"I've been watchin' for the gal over eight months now, under pay from Mr. Frisbie," he assured Old Cy when they met. "I also sent word to Old Tomah

late last fall, 'n' he came out o' the woods 'n' stayed here two months, but nothin's been heard o' poor Chip by any one, 'n' I doubt ever will be."

"Mebbe not yet," answered Old Cy, "but thar will be some day, an' here, too. She hadn't a cent when she left Greenvale — only grit, 'n' it's a long ways here fer a gal what's got to arn her vittles while she's trampin'. It may be one year, it may be two, but some day Chip'll show up here, if she lives to do it. I callate I'd best wait here a few weeks tho', an' then, if nothin' turns up, I'll start ag'in."

Nothing did, however; but during his stay, Old Cy learned that Chip's entire history, from the night she left Tim's Place until she ran away from Greenvale, was known at this village. This fact was of no value whatever, except to prove the universal interest all humanity has in the fate and fortune of one another.

"I never told what happened in the woods," Levi responded when Old Cy questioned him, "an' didn't need to, for it got here 'fore I did. I jest 'lowed it was true, 'n' that I was hired to wait and watch here for Chip. It's curis, too, how everybody here feels 'bout it. They're a poorish sort here, families o' lumbermen, men that work in the sawmills, some farmin', an' all findin' it hard work to git

a livin'. An' yet they're so interested in Chip 'n' so sorry for her, if she shows up now she'd be carried 'round the village like some queen 'ud be, with everybody follerin'. Thar's 'nother curis thing happened since I've been here that I'd never believed o' these people neither. I told them, of course, who I was, 'n' what I was here for, 'n' who was payin' me, when I come, an' then as time kinder went slow, I began huntin' some 'round here. Wal, thar's a little graveyard up back o' the village 'n' all growed up to weeds 'n' bushes, an' one day last fall I happened to be lookin' it over 'n' somebody come 'long. It was a man that keeps store here, an' I asked him if 'twas here Chip's mother was buried. He said 'twas, an' pointed out the spot 'way up in one corner, 'thout any stone, 'n' the mound most hid in a tangle. I didn't say nothin'—jest looked, an' went on, 'n' that was all. Wal, the curis part is last spring they sot a couple o' men to work cleanin' up the graveyard o' bushes an' laid out walks 'n' built a new fence 'round it. That one unmarked grave got the most attention o' all, for they turfed it over nice and built a little fence 'round it. I kinder callated how 'n' why it all come 'bout, 'n' feelin' I oughter do suthin, I had a little stun sot up with Chip's mother's name on it."

But time also went "kinder slow" for Old Cy, and as the date for Martin's probable coming had now passed, he finally yielded to Levi's suggestion and the call of the wilderness as well, and the two started for Martin's camp.

It was almost like a pilgrimage to one's boyhood home; for while scarce a year had elapsed since Old Cy and Martin's party left it, Nature, always seeking to hide human handiwork, had been busy, and the garden was a tangle of weeds. Amzi's old cabin was almost hid by bushes, the walks were choked with them, and a colony of squirrels frisked about, and now, alarmed at human presence, added a touch of pathos.

One act of vandalism was in evidence, for some wandering trappers had apparently used the larger cabin the previous season. Its floor was littered with all manner of débris, the bones of a deer mouldered in the woodshed, and a family of porcupines had also found the premises available. The impression conveyed by the entire spot and its surroundings made even Levi gloomy, while Old Cy scarce spoke the entire first day there, except to exclaim at "varmints" who would break locks, use the cabin for months, and then leave a litter of garbage to draw vermin.

"It's curis how near to hogs 'n' hyenas a few humans are," he said as he looked around and saw how these vandals had behaved. "They wa'n't satisfied with burglin' the cabin, turnin' it into a pig-pen, stealin' all they could carry off, but they was so durned lazy, they smashed up the furniture to burn."

For a few days only these two fine old backwoodsmen tarried here, and then Old Cy proposed departure.

"I can't take no comfort here, nohow," he said, "for the premises seem ha'nted. Whichever way I turn I 'spect to meet Amzi with his moon eyes, or see Chip watchin' me, or Angie steppin' out o' the cabin. If I stayed here long, I'd see Chip's spites crawlin' out o' the bushes soon ez it got dusky. I'm used to the woods, but this spot seems like a graveyard.

"I never done no prayin'," he added sadly. "I don't b'lieve in't. But if I could set eyes on Chip this minit, I'd go right down on my knees 'n' say, 'Thank God for this blessin'.' I'm 'fraid I never will, though."

The next morning these two friends left this abode of unseen forms, more disconsolate than ever. They halted at Tim's Place long enough to learn that no

tidings of McGuire or the half-breed had even reached that filthy station, and then returned to the settlement once more. Here Old Cy waited until the summer waned, vainly hoping each day would at least bring some word from Martin or Chip, and then bade Levi good-bye, and departed.

He had been gone a week, a wandering tramp once more, when Ray appeared, bearing the glad news that Chip had been found. And also another and a more astounding fact.

But Old Cy was not there.

CHAPTER XXXIV

LIFE, always colorless at Christmas Cove, except in midsummer, now became changed for Aunt Abby. For all the years since her one girlish romance had ended, she had been a patient helpmate to a man she merely respected. Religion had been her chief solace. The annual visit to her sister's gave the only relief to this motionless life, monotonous as the tides sweeping in and out of the cove; but now a counter-current slowly flowed into it.

Chip, of course, with her winsome eyes and grateful ways, was its mainspring, and so checkered had been her career and so humiliating all her past experiences, that now, escaped from dependence and feeling herself a valued companion, she tasted a new and joyous life. So true was this, that hard lessons at school, the regularity of church-going, and the unvarying tenor of it all seemed less by comparison.

Another undercurrent, aside from Chip's devotion, also swept into Aunt Abby's feelings, — the strange emotions following the knowledge that her former lover was still alive. For many years she

had waited and hoped for this sailor boy's return; then her heart had grown silent, as hope slowly ebbed, and then, almost forgetfulness — but not quite, however, for the long, lily-dotted mill-pond just above had now and then been visited by them. A certain curiously grown oak which was secluded near its upper end was once a trysting-place, and even the old mill with its plashing wheel held memories.

And now after forty years, during which she had become gray-haired and slightly wrinkled, all these memories returned like ghosts of long ago. No word or hint of them fell from her lips, not even to Chip, who was now nearest to her; and yet had that girl been a mind-reader, she would have seen that Aunt Abby's persistent interest in all she had to tell about Old Cy meant something. Where he was now, how soon he would learn that his brother was still alive after all these years, was the one most pertinent subject oft discussed.

How Chip felt toward him, not alone for the heritage he had secured for her, but for other and more valued heart interests, need not be specified. He had seemed almost a father to her at the lake. He was the first of her new-found friends whose feelings had warmed toward her, and Chip was now

mature enough to value these blessings at their true worth.

A certain mutual expectancy now entered the lives of Chip and Aunt Abby. Nothing could be done, however. Old Cy had gone out into the wide, wide world, as it were, searching for the little girl he loved. No manner of reaching him seemed possible; and yet, some day, he must learn what would bring him to them as fast as steam could fetch him.

"I know that he loved me as his own child there at the lake," Chip said once in an exultant tone. "His going after me proves it; and once he hears where I am, he will hurry here, I know."

Whether Aunt Abby's heart responded to that wish or not, she never disclosed.

But the days, weeks, and months swept by, and Old Cy came not. Neither did any message come to Chip from Greenvale. At first, rebelling at Ray's treatment of her, Chip felt that she never wanted to see him again. She had been so tender and loving toward him at the lake, had striven so hard to learn and to be more like him, had waited and watched, counting the days until his return, only to be told what she could not forget and to find him so neglectful, so cool to her, when her girlish heart was so full of love, that her feelings had changed

almost in one instant, and pride had made her bitter.

Hannah had told an unpleasant truth, as Chip knew well enough; but truth and confiding love mixed illy, and Ray's conduct, leaving her as he did with scarce a word or promise, was an episode that had chilled and almost killed Chip's budding affection. As is always the case, such a feeling fades and flares like all others. There would now be a brief space when Chip hoped and longed for Ray's coming, and then days when no thought of him came.

It was perhaps fortunate for him that Christmas Cove contained no serious admirer of Chip the while, else his cause and all memory of him would have been swept away. But that quaint village was peopled chiefly by old folk, those of the male persuasion being quite young, with a few girls of Chip's age. Few young men remained there to make their way, and so no added interest came to vary Chip's life.

The coming of summer, however, brought the annual influx of city boarders once more. First came elderly ladies, more anxious about suitable rooms and food than aught else, and then came the younger ones, whose gowns and their display ap-

peared the only motive for existence. A few young men followed in their wake. Now and then a small yacht anchored in the mouth of the cove. The long wharf became a rendezvous for promenaders, tennis courts were established, and gay costumes, bright parasols, and astounding hats were in evidence.

It was all a new and fascinating panorama for Chip. Never before had she seen such butterflies of fashion, who glanced at her and her more modest raiment almost with scorn, and scarce conscious of them, she looked on with awe and admiration.

The old mill, the quaint house where she dwelt, and especially the long pond, now sprinkled thickly with lilies, became a Mecca for these newcomers, and not a pleasant day passed but from two to a dozen of them came trooping about and around it. They peered into the mill, exclaimed over the great dripping wheel, and almost shouted at the sight of the white blossoms on the pond.

One day a bevy of laughing and chattering girls with one gallant in white flannels approached the mill while Chip in calico was kneeling beside a flower-bed. She looked up at once and saw her erstwhile admirer at Peaceful Valley, Mr. Goodnow. One instant only their eyes met, his to turn quickly away, and then Chip, coloring at the slight, rose

and entered the house. Once safe in this asylum, womanlike, she hastened to peep out at the arrivals. They halted for only a glance about and then, their protector (?) still in the lead, vanished behind the mill.

The next afternoon, just as Chip was returning from the village store, she met Mr. Goodnow again, this time alone.

With a bow and smile he raised his hat and halted.

"Why, Miss Raymond," he exclaimed eagerly, "I am so glad to meet you again. Are you visiting here, and when did you leave Peaceful Valley?"

"I am living here now," returned Chip, coolly, continuing on her way, "where you saw me yesterday."

"Oh, yes," he answered, not the least abashed, "and you must pardon me for not recognizing you then. It's been a year, you know, since I saw you, and you have changed so in that time."

"Of course," responded Chip, her eyes snapping, "you couldn't remember me so long. Why don't you tell the truth and say you didn't dare know me before those ladies?"

"Why, Miss Raymond, you wrong me; but I admire your frankness — it is so unusual among your charming sex!"

"Then you did know me," she returned sarcastically, "I knew well enough, and if they were with you now, you wouldn't know me. I'm no fool, if I do wear calico."

It was blunt. It was truthful. It was Chip all over; but this polished rake never winced.

"I never dispute a lady," he answered suavely; "it doesn't pay. Besides, I have found they all prefer sweet lies instead of truth. And now I will admit you looked so charming as you raised your face from among the flowers that I was dazed and didn't think to bow."

"You weren't so dazed but that you managed to get away in a hurry."

"Why, of course, I was piloting my friends up to the lily pond," he returned, still unruffled, "and much as I desired, I couldn't pause to visit with you."

They had now reached Chip's home. She halted at the gate, turned, and looked at him.

"I hope we may be friends, now that you have scolded me enough," he added. "I had a delightful week with you last summer. I've lived it over many times. May I not call here to-morrow, and you and I will gather some of the lilies?"

A droll smile crept over Chip's face at this.

"Yes, if you will bring your lady friends also," she answered. And with a "Thank you," and raising his hat once more, this smooth-spoken fellow, impervious to sarcasm, turned away.

"Who was the young man?" Aunt Abby queried, when Chip entered the house.

"It's a Mr. Goodnow, who spent a week with Uncle Jud," she answered, smiling. "He came by here yesterday with three ladies and was close to me when I was working in my posy bed. He made out he didn't remember me then, when I met him this afternoon. I guess I was saucy to him. I meant to be. He wouldn't take it, and walked home with me."

Aunt Abby looked surprised.

"I hope you weren't really saucy," she answered, "that wouldn't have been becoming."

Mr. Goodnow appeared next day, not at all disturbed, and Chip, a little more gracious, consented to gather lilies with him. The leaky punt that had served for that purpose many years was bailed out. He manned the oars. Chip bared one rounded arm, and, thus equipped, two really enjoyable hours were passed.

As Uncle Jud had said, he was a "slick talker." Truth was not considered by him; instead, subtile

flatteries were his stock in trade, and Chip, for the first time in her life, felt their insidious influence. She was in no wise deceived. Her woman's wit and good sense detected the sham, and caring not one whit for him, she responded as saucily as she chose. It was not, perhaps, quite ladylike, but Chip was not as yet a polished lady; instead, she was a decidedly blunt-spoken girl who enjoyed exasperating this fashionable Lothario.

And never before had he met her like or one so fearless of speech.

"You are the sauciest girl I have ever had the pleasure of meeting," he said, as they drew up to the landing and began sorting the lilies. "I didn't notice it so much last summer; and yet you are no less charming, mainly because you are so frank. Most ladies whom I know are not so. They are arrant hypocrites and not one assertion in ten can be taken at its face value."

"You seem to have been an apt scholar," Chip responded, smiling. "If you like my blunt speech, as you say, why don't you imitate it and be truthful for once in your life?"

"I dare not. No man ever yet won a woman's favor by plain speech."

"And so you want my favor. What for? I am

not of your sort. I do not spend my life playing golf and tennis and wearing fine clothes."

"But you ought to. You have the face and form required, and once you got into the swim of society, you would become a leader."

Chip greeted this with a laugh. "Do you plaster it on as thick as that with every one," she queried, "and will they stand it?"

"Why, yes," he chuckled, "and almost beg for more. My ladies thrive on flattery, and unless a man doles it out to them, they think him stupid."

When he had helped her out of the boat, holding and pressing her hand unduly long she thought, he gathered up the lilies and, with a graceful bow and "Sweets to the sweet," offered them to her.

"I don't want them," she answered bluntly. "Take them to your arrant hypocrites and tell them a girl you couldn't fool sent 'em." And nonplussed a little at this speech, but still smiling, he followed Chip to the house. At the gate he halted and their eyes met.

"I've had a most charming morning, for which I thank you," he said. And drawing two of the largest blooms from the bunch of lilies, he laid the rest on the gate-post. "You will have to take them," he added. "And now I have something else to

propose. I own a small yacht. It is anchored down near the wharf. How would you like a sail to-morrow? I shall be highly pleased to have you for my guest. Will you go?"

But Chip was not caught so easily.

"I'll go if you will ask Aunt Abby also," she answered, "not otherwise."

"Why, of course," he responded graciously, "that is understood."

And still unruffled by this parting evidence of distrust, he bowed himself away.

CHAPTER XXXV

"A girl with a new ring allus hez trouble with her hair."
—Old Cy Walker.

As might be expected, Chip gave Aunt Abby a full recital of her morning's episode as soon as she entered the house, and with it her comments upon this smooth-spoken young man.

"He reeled off flattery by the yard," she said, "and no matter how I took it, or how sharply I set him back, he kept at it. The way he piled it on was almost funny, just as though he thought I believed it. Of course I didn't, not a word, and what's more I wouldn't trust him farther than I could see him. He's got shifty eyes, and Cy once told me never to believe a man with such eyes. He wants me to go sailing with him to-morrow, and I said I would go if you were asked. I knew you wouldn't go, however."

"Of course not," answered Aunt Abby, severely, "and his asking you in such a way was almost an insult. If he had meant well, he would have said he was taking other friends out and would have

asked us both to join them. I should not have consented to that even, however. These summer people are not our sort, and to accept such favors from them is to put ourselves in a fair way of being laughed at. I would advise, also, that you have no more to say to this young man. It will not reflect credit upon you if you do."

That afternoon, while Chip practised upon her banjo, it being vacation time, Aunt Abby called upon several neighbors with news-gathering intent. She succeeded to the fullest, and that evening related it to Chip.

"This Mr. Goodnow has been here about two weeks," she said, "and is boarding at Captain Perkins's. He came in a small steam yacht he claims he owns, and has been going about with three ladies who are stopping at the Mix House. Two of them are sisters, the Misses Wilson, and a Mrs. Simpson, a widow. He seems the most devoted to the widow. They have been out driving quite often, and once or twice she has been sailing with him alone. It's all right, of course, only she being a good deal older than he is, makes it seem curious. When he calls here to-morrow, as I suppose he will, I'd better see him."

He called quite early the next morning, as may be

guessed, and a more picture-book yachtsman Aunt Abby never set eyes upon. His white duck shoes, trousers, and cap, white flannel coat, dark blue silk shirt, jaunty sailor tie and russet belt, all completed an attire so spick and span that it seemed that he must have just emerged from a tailor shop.

But Aunt Abby was not awed overmuch. She had seen his like before, and met him at her door with serene self-possession.

"I am Mr. Goodnow," he explained with easy assurance, "and Miss Raymond has kindly consented to accept a few hours' enjoyment in my yacht if you will also honor me." And he bowed again.

"We thank you very much, sir," Aunt Abby responded stiffly, "but I must decline for us both. We should hardly care to accept hospitalities which we could not return."

"I regret it very much," he answered in a hurt tone, "and assure you I am the one to feel obligated." And then, as Aunt Abby drew back, and the door began to close very slowly, he bowed and retreated in good order.

But he was not to be thus checkmated, and from now on he began to watch for chances to intercept and accost Chip.

It was, and always had been, a part of her nature

to be out of doors as much as possible, and since the close of school she was out more than ever. Somewhat akin to Old Cy in love of Nature, the fields, woods, and streams had always attracted her, and at Christmas Cove the sea added a new charm to which she yielded nearly every pleasant day. And her steps led her far and wide.

Down to the seldom-used wharf to watch the tide ebb and flow between its mussel-coated piles, over the broad-rippled sands of the cove when the tide left them bare, around to the long, rocky barrier beyond the cove where the sea waves dashed, were her favorite strolls.

The next afternoon she strayed to where the ocean spray was leaping. She had scarce reached her favorite lookout spot, a shaded cliff, when she saw Goodnow approaching.

Her first impulse was to return home at once, the next to remain.

She did not fear him, he seemed such an effeminate, foppish sort of man, that lithe and strong as she was, she felt she could outrun him, or, if need be, throw him into the sea. And so she waited, cool and indifferent. Although conscious that he was nearing her, she never turned her head until he was beside her. Then she looked up.

"I beg your pardon," he said, raising his hat, "but may I share this cliff with you?" And he seated himself near.

"It isn't mine," answered Chip, rather ungraciously, "so there's no need to ask."

"But every lady has a right to decline a gentleman's company wherever she is," he responded in his usual suave tone. "I saw you coming here, and I'll admit I was bold enough to follow."

"And what for?" she answered, in her blunt way, "I never invited you."

"No, you didn't, and I never expect you will. But you are such a saucy, fascinating little wood-nymph that I couldn't help it. I am sorry, though, that you and your worthy aunt refused my yacht yesterday. I wanted an opportunity to get better acquainted with her and yourself as well, and thought that a good way.

"Do you love the ocean," he continued, as Chip made no response, "and is this village your real home, or do you reside at Peaceful Valley?"

"I live here now," returned Chip, resolving to be brief in all her answers and hoping he would betake himself away.

She did not like him, nor his smooth, polished speech. She felt that it was all affected, and that

at heart he meant no good toward her. Then his failure to recognize her when with his lady friends still rankled. She knew well enough that he dared not admit acquaintance with a calico-clad country girl at that moment. And what the gossips of Christmas Cove insinuated about him and this widow awoke her contempt.

Totally unused to the ways of fashionable society as she was, for him to play court to a widow evidently ten or fifteen years his senior seemed unnatural.

His almost nauseating and persistent flattery of herself was equally objectionable. All this flashed over her now while he was talking.

"You must find it lonesome here," he said, in response to her admission; "but perhaps you have a beau, a sweetheart, somewhere, whom you care for."

Chip colored slightly, but made no answer.

"I'm sure you haven't here," he went on, "for I've not seen an eligible fellow native to this village since I came." He paused a moment, awaiting an admission, and then continued: "How do you pass the time, anyway, and isn't life here monotonous? Don't you long for some excitement, some fun, some color to it all? I've watched these vil-

lagers now for three weeks and their lives seem so prosy, so dead slow, it is painful. They get up, eat, chase the cows and chickens, hoe in the gardens, mow hay, and every blessed woman wears the same calico gown six days in the week. Sundays they all spruce up, go to meeting, and the next week repeat the programme. Isn't it so?"

"I presume it is," answered Chip, with rising ire; "but if folks here weren't satisfied, they could move away, couldn't they? And if it's all so dull, what did you come here for? Nobody asked you, did they?"

"No," he responded, laughing, "no one did, and no one will miss me when I go — not even you. The only redeeming feature is that they all seem willing to take my money."

"Would you stay if they weren't," she returned, still more hotly, "would you sponge on us folks and sneer at us as well?"

"Keep cool, my dear girl," he answered unruffled, "keep cool, and let your lovely hair grow. I'm not sneering at you or any one. I am merely stating facts. To us who live in the whirl of city life, a few weeks here is a delightful change, and we are glad to pay well for it. I am only speaking of how it must seem to live this way all the time."

He paused a moment, watching Chip's face turned half away, and then continued persuasively: "I am sorry you are so ready to believe ill of me or to think I am sneering at all things. In that you have changed very much since last summer. Then you seemed to enjoy talking with me; now you blaze up into wrath at my pleasantry. I am very sorry you feel as you do. I'd like to be better friends with you if possible, otherwise I wouldn't have risked the rebuff I received from your excellent aunt yesterday. I'd like very much to call on you, and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to entertain you and your aunt on my boat. I am an idle fellow, I'll admit, with nothing to do but spend my time and money, but that is my misfortune, and you ought to have pity on me."

And so this smooth-tongued, persuasive talker ran on and on while Chip, fascinated, in spite of her dislike of him, listened.

More than that, he grew eloquent and even pathetic at times in describing his hopes and ambitions in life. He even asserted that he longed to live differently and to become a useful man, instead of an idle one. It was all hypocrisy, of course, but Chip was scarce able to detect it, and lulled by his specious, pleading voice, she admitted that she had

no real reason for distrusting or disliking him. Also, that she would enjoy a sail on his boat, and would try to persuade her aunt to accept another invitation.

This especially was what he most wanted, for shrewd schemer that he was, he knew that if he could ingratiate himself with this guardian aunt, permission to call must follow, and with that, some opportunity to make a conquest of this simple country girl.

Sated as he was with the society of more polished and therefore artificial womanhood, *blasé* to all the purities of life and refined society, a roué and rake conversant with all vice, this fearless, wholesome, yet unsophisticated girl who seemed like a breath from the pine woods, attracted him as no other could.

And now he had her almost spellbound on this lonely shore, with the sea murmuring at their feet and the cool winds whispering in the pine trees shading them.

It was Don Juan and Haidee over again, only this Juan was a more selfish and heartless one, calculating on the ruin of this wood-born flower without thought of consequences.

He made one mistake, however, after he had lulled

her into almost believing him to be both honest and worthy, — he sneered at religion.

"All that people go to church for is to see and be seen, ladies especially," he said. "They live to dress and show off their new gowns and hats, and were it not for the chance church-going gives them, not one parson in a hundred would have a corporal's guard for audience. As for the preaching, not one in ten understands a word of it, and most of those who understand fail to believe it. I don't, I am sure. I consider a minister is a man who talks to earn his money. A few old tabbies, of course, are sincere and believe in prayer and all that sort of foolishness, but the rest only make believe they do. There may be a God and maybe there isn't — I don't know. I doubt it, however. As for the hereafter, that is all moonshine. When we go, that is the end of us."

"And so you don't believe in spirits and a future life," answered Chip, with sudden defiance. "Well, I do, and I know that people have souls that live again, for I've seen them, hundreds of times. As for all church-going people being hypocrites, that's a lie, and I know better. The best woman I ever knew believed in praying, and so did my mother, and I won't hear them called such a name."

It was Chip, blazing up again, in defence of her own opinions, and this smooth-spoken fellow saw his mistake on the instant.

"Oh, well, you may be right," he admitted at once. "I wasn't speaking of all womankind — only the fashionable ones whom I know. As for soul life, I want to believe as you do, of course, and wish you would convince me that it is true." And so peace was restored, and once more the lullaby of his wooing talk began.

For two hours he spun to Chip the web of his blandishments, and then the sun warned her, and she rose to go.

"It would be delightful to escort you home," he said, "but I fear I'd better not. Your aunt might see us returning, and scold you. Now if you will meet me here again to-morrow afternoon, and try to convince me that there is a future life, I shall be most happy. Will you?"

But Chip was alert.

"No, I don't think I shall," she responded bluntly; "I am not running after you — not a step. As for what you believe or don't believe, that isn't my look-out," and with an almost uncivil "Good day, sir," she left him.

The farther away she got from this snakelike

charmer, the more an intuitive belief in his real intentions possessed her. She was unskilled in the fine art of conversation, had only the inborn purity of her thoughts to protect her; and yet she half read this specious flatterer, and felt, rather than realized, his baseness.

A change in her own convictions that now served as a mantle of protection against his persuasions had come to her during these dreamy hours by the sea. Accepting at first Old Tomah's superstitions, she had been led to contemplate the great question of future life and the existence of God. Aunt Comfort's unselfish character, combined with perfect faith in the Supreme Power, had had its influence. Angie's kindness and that first prayer Chip had heard in the tent were not lost. Aunt Abby's consistent belief and devotion to duty also had had its effect; and all these pertinent examples, combined with the impress of the vast ocean, the solitude of this lonely shore, and the echo of its ceaseless billows, had awakened true veneration in Chip's heart, and convinced her that some Unseen Power moved all human impulse and controlled all human destiny.

CHAPTER XXXVI

After Chip had run away from Greenvale, concealment of her name and all else had forced itself upon her. It was not natural for her to deceive. She had kept it up for one unhappy year only under inward protest, which ended in abject confession and tears. Now recalling that unpleasant episode, she made haste to confess her long conversation with this fluent fellow.

"Mr. Goodnow followed me over to the point this afternoon," she explained that evening to Aunt Abby, "and talked for two hours. He was nice enough, but he made me sick of him, he flattered me so much."

Aunt Abby looked at her with a slight sense of alarm.

"He certainly has the gift of impudence, at least," she said, "in view of the way I declined his invitation yesterday. I think you'd best discontinue your long rambles for the present, or until he leaves here. He is not our sort. He is not even a friend of ours, and if people see you together, they will say unkind things."

That was warning enough for Chip, and from that time on she never even walked down to the village store except with Aunt Abby.

A curious and almost ridiculous espionage followed, however, for a week, and not a pleasant afternoon passed but this fellow was noticed strolling somewhere near the old mill or past the house.

Another amazing evidence of his intent was received a few days later, in the shape of a five-pound box of choicest candies, that came by express with his card. Aunt Abby opened this and saw the card, and the next day she commissioned the stage driver to deliver the box, card and all, to Mr. Goodnow at his boarding house.

A long and adroitly worded letter to Chip came a day later, so humble, so flattering, and so importuning that it made her laugh.

"I think that fellow must have gone crazy," she said, handing the letter to Aunt Abby, "he runs on so about how he can't sleep nights from thinking about me. He says that he must go away next week, and shall die if he can't see me once more. What ails him, anyway?"

"Nothing, except evil intentions," responded Aunt Abby, perusing the missive. "He must think you a fool to believe such bosh," she added severely, after

finishing it. "Honest love doesn't grow like a mushroom in one night, and the difference between his position and yours gives the lie to all he says. I hope he will go away next week, and never come back."

Whether Chip's studied avoidance of him, combined with the snubbing, served its purpose, or he decided his quest was hopeless, could only be guessed, for he was seen no more near the mill, and the next week his yacht left Christmas Cove, and Chip felt relieved.

It had been an experience quite new to her, and, in spite of its annoyance, somewhat exciting. It also served another purpose of more value, — it recalled Ray to her by sheer force of contrast. She had felt hurt ever since the night she left Greenvale. She had meant to put him out of her thoughts and forget all the silly hours and promises at the lake; and yet she never had succeeded. Instead, her thoughts turned to him in spite of her pride.

And now, contrasting and comparing that honest, manly lad, a playmate only, and yet a lover as well, with this polished, fulsome, flattering, shifty-eyed fop, who sneered at everything good, only made Ray, with his far different ways, seem the more attractive.

Then conscience began to smite her. She had

yielded to pride and put him away from her thoughts. His uncle had almost pleaded for her to return to Greenvale, if only for a visit. She knew Ray had spent weeks in searching for her; yet not once in all the two years since they parted had she sent him a line of remembrance.

More mature now, Chip began to see her own conduct as it was, and to realize that she had been both ungrateful and heartless; but she could not confess it to any one, not even Aunt Abby.

Chip's life had been a strange, complex series of moods of peculiar effect, and her conduct must be judged accordingly.

First, the dense ignorance of years at Tim's Place, with its saving grace of disgust at such surroundings and such a life. Then a few months with people so different and so kind that it seemed an entrance into heaven, to be followed by weeks of a growing realization that she was a nobody, and an outcast unfit for Greenvale.

And then came the climax of all this: the bitter sneers of Hannah, Ray's cool neglect, the consciousness that she was only a dependent pauper, and then her flight into the world and away from all that stung her like so many whips.

But a revulsion of feeling was coming. Chip, no

longer a simple child of the wilderness, was realizing her own needs and her own nature. Something broader and more satisfying than school life and the companionship of Aunt Abby was needed; yet how to find it never occurred to her.

With September came Aunt Abby's annual visit to Peaceful Valley. A few days before their departure, Chip received a letter which was so unexpected and so vital to her feelings that it must be quoted.

It was dated at the little village of Grindstone, directed to Vera McGuire, care of Judson Walker, by whom it was forwarded to Christmas Cove.

"My dear Chip," it began.

"I feel that you will not care to hear from me, and yet I must write. I know I am more to blame than any one for the way you left Greenvale, and that you must consider me a foolish boy, without much courage, which I have been, and I realize it only too well now, when it is too late. But I am more of a man to-day, I hope, and sometime I shall come and try to obtain your forgiveness for being so blind. No one ever has been, and I know no one ever will be, what you are to me. As Old Cy says, 'Blessings brighten as they vanish,' and now, after this long separation, one

word and one smile from dear little Chip would seem priceless to me, and I shall come and try to win it before many months.

"I am here with Uncle Martin's old guide, Levi. We are going into the woods to-morrow to gather gum and trap until spring. I have hired two other men to help, and hope to do well and make some money. I think you will be glad to know that Old Cy was here this summer and was well. He does not know that you have been found, and is still hunting for you. Levi told me that the people here are much interested in you, that they have fixed up the yard where your mother is buried, and he put up a small stone.

"I wish I could hear from you, but there is no chance now. Please try to forgive a foolish boy for being stupid, and think of me as you did during those happy days by the lake.

"Good-bye,
"RAY."

How every word of this half-boyish, half-manly letter was read and re-read by Chip; how it woke the old memories of the wilderness and of herself, a ragged waif there; and how, somehow, in spite of pride and anger, a little thrill of happiness crept into her heart, needs no explanation.

But she was not quite ready yet to forgive him, and what he failed to say when he might, still rankled in her feelings.

But Old Cy, that kindly soul, so like a father! Almost did she feel that to meet him would be worth more than to see any one else in the world. And to think he was still hunting for her, far and near!

And now, quite unlike most young ladies, who deem their love missives sacred, Chip showed hers to Aunt Abby.

"It's from Raymond Stetson," she said, rather bashfully, "a boy who was in the woods with those people who were kind to me, and we became very good friends."

Aunt Abby smiled as she perused its contents.

"And so he was the cause of your running away from Greenvale," she said. "Why didn't you write him a note of thanks after you learned he had been searching for you? I think he deserved that much, at least."

"I wouldn't humble myself," Chip answered spiritedly, "and then I was ashamed to let any one know I had used his name. I hadn't time to think what name to give when Uncle Jud asked me, and his was the first that came to mind," she added naïvely.

Aunt Abby laughed.

"I guess Master Stetson won't find forgiveness hard to earn," she said, and then her face beamed at the disclosure of a romance while she read the letter a second time.

But there was more to tell, as Aunt Abby knew full well, and now, bit by bit, she drew the story from Chip, even to the admission of the tender scenes between these two lovers, in which they promised to love each other and be married.

"It was silly, I suppose," Chip continued blushingly, "but I didn't know any better then, and I was so happy that I didn't think about it at all. I never had a beau before, you see, and I guess I acted foolishly. Old Cy used to help us, too, and took us away so we could have a chance to hold hands and act silly. I was so lonesome, too, for Ray all that winter in Greenvale, and nobody knew it. I walked a mile to meet the stage every night for a month, to be the first to see him when he came. I guess he must have thought he owned me. I wouldn't do it now."

Once more Aunt Abby laughed, a good, hearty laugh, and then, much to Chip's astonishment, she took her face in her hands and kissed it.

"You dear little goose," she said, "and to think

you ran away from a boy you cared for like that! I only hope he is good enough for you, for I can see what the outcome will be."

That night when the tea-table had been cleared and the lamp lit, Aunt Abby once more began her adroit questioning of Chip; but this time it was of Old Cy, and all about him. For an hour, Chip, nothing loath, recited his praises, repeated his odd sayings, described his looks and ways and portrayed him as best she could, while Aunt Abby smiled content.

"It makes me feel young again to hear your story and about Cyrus," she said when all was told. "I was just sixteen when he first came to see me. He was also my first beau, you know. I should judge he must have changed so I would never know him, and maybe he wouldn't recognize me. Forty years is a long time!" And she sighed.

And now Aunt Abby closed her eyes, let fall her knitting, and lapsed into bygones.

No longer was she a staid and matronly widow — not young, it is true, yet not old, but with rounded face, few wrinkles, and slightly gray hair. Instead was she sweet Abby Grey of the long ago, and once more the belle of this quiet village and Bayport, and the leader at every dance, every husking, and every

party. Once more she primped and curled her hair, and donned her best, and waited her sailor boy's coming. Once more she heard the bells jingle and saw the stars twinkle as they sped away to a winter night's dance — and once more she felt the sorrow of parting, the long years of waiting, waiting, waiting, and at last the numb despair and final conviction that never would her lover return.

And now he was still alive, though a wanderer, and some day he might — surely would come to see her, just once, if no more.

"Ah, me," she said, rousing herself at last and looking at Chip's smiling, sunny face, "life is a queer riddle, and we never know how to guess it."

Then she sighed again.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"The milk o' human kindness 'most allus turns out old cheese, 'n' all rind at that." — OLD CY WALKER.

SOME sneering critic once said that few young men ever start out in the world until they are kicked out, and there is a grain of truth in that assertion. It is seldom an actual kick, however, but some motive force quite as compelling.

In Ray's case it was his uncle's assertion that if he hoped to win Chip he must first show the ability to provide a home for her, which is excellent advice for any young man to follow.

"It won't be a pleasure trip," Martin said when Ray proposed to go to the wilderness and, with Levi and a couple of other assistants, make a business of gum-gathering and trap-setting, "but you can't lose much by it. You are welcome to the camp; Levi will see that you have game enough to eat, and boss the expedition. I will loan you five hundred, and with what you have, that is capital enough and you ought to do well. It would be better if Old Cy could

take charge, but as it is, you must go it alone." And go it alone Ray did.

Levi's services were easily secured. Two young fellows whom he knew were hired at Greenvale. A bateau was purchased, together with more traps and supplies, and after Ray had written Chip his plan, the party started for Martin's camp. They had been established there a month and were doing well. The first ice had begun forming in shallow coves when one afternoon, who should enter the lake and paddle rapidly across but Old Cy.

"Ye can't git rid o' me when trappin's goin' on," he said cheerily, as Ray and Levi met him at the landing. "I fetched into the settlement kinder homesick fer the woods last week. I heard the good news 'bout Chip's bein' found 'n' you'd come here fer the winter, 'n' I didn't wait a minute 'fore I hired a canoe 'n' started." And then, in the exuberance of his joy, he shook hands with Ray and Levi once more.

That evening, Ray, who had hard work to keep the secret so long, told Old Cy who lived in Peaceful Valley.

It was like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, a shock of joyful news that made Old Cy gasp.

"Why, I feel jest like a colt once more," he said

after the exclamation stage had passed. "An', do ye know, boys, I felt all the way comin' in ez though good news was waitin' fer me. I 'spose 'twas from hearin' Chip was all right ag'in."

That evening was one that none who were in that wildwood camp ever forgot, for Old Cy was the central figure, and told as only he could the story of his year's wandering in search of Chip.

It was humorous, pathetic, and tragic all in one, and a tale that held its listeners spellbound for three delightful hours.

"I had dogs set on me, hundreds on 'em," Old Cy said, in conclusion, "an' I never knew afore how many kinds 'n' sizes o' dogs thar was in this world. I uster think thar warn't more'n two dozen or so kinds. I know now thar's two million 'n' a few more I didn't wait to count. I got 'rested a few times on account o' not havin' visible means o' support. I've been hauled over the coals by doctors tryin' to make me out a lunatic, 'n' I'd 'a' done time in jail if I hadn't had money to show. I tell ye, boys, this is an awful 'spicious world fer strangers, 'n' the milk o' human kindness is mostly old cheese, 'n' all rind at that. I had a little fun, too, mixed in with all the trouble, 'n' one woman who owned a place where I 'plied for lodgin' jest 'bout told me she'd be

willin' to marry me if I'd stay 'n' work the farm. She had red hair, hard eyes, 'n' bossy sort o' ways, an' that's a dangerous combination. I watched my chance when she wa'n't lookin', 'n' lit out middlin' lively."

And now life at this wilderness camp, less restrained than when womankind were here, became one of work, and persistent, steady, no-time-wasted work at that. Martin had said that Levi could boss matters, but it was Ray who assumed management instead. Two years and changed him almost from boy to man. His new ambition was the controlling power. He was here to make his mark, as it were, and the half-hearted, boyish interest in work had changed into a tireless leadership. Then, too, an unspoken, tacit interest in his ambition was felt by those who helped. They knew what he was striving for, and that Chip was the ultimate object. Her history, known as it now was to all who came into the wilderness, influenced these woodsmen. She had been of them and from them, and as an entire village will gather to help at a house-raising, so these three, Levi and the two helpers, now felt the same incentive.

Success usually comes to all who strive for it, and now, with four willing workers to aid him, Ray was

rapidly making a success of this venture. Old Cy, the most valuable assistant, was indefatigable. He not only kept the larder well supplied with game, but tended and set traps, worked in the woods with the rest between times, and his cheerful optimism and droll humor bridged many a stormy day and shortened many a weary tramp. And he seemed to grow younger in this new, helpful life for others. His eyes were bright, his step elastic, his spirits buoyant, his strength tireless.

With Chip safe and provided for, with Ray succeeding in manhood's natural ambition, Old Cy saw his heart's best hopes nearing fruition, and for these two and in these two all his interest centred.

Only once was the bond of feeling between Ray and Chip referred to by Old Cy, and then in response to a wish of Ray's that he might hear from her.

"I don't think ye've cause to worry now, arter ye've sent her word what ye're doin' 'n' who for," he answered. "Chip's true blue, not one o' the fickle sort, 'n' once she keers fer a man, she won't give him up till he's married or dead. I think ye'd orter sent her word sooner, — ye know she run 'way out o' spunk, — but when ye go to her like a man 'n' say, 'I've been workin' 'n' waitin' fer ye all the time,' thar won't be no quarrellin'."

"I'm not so sure about that," responded Ray, soberly. "From what Uncle Martin said, my chance is gone with Miss Chip, and I don't blame her for feeling so. Like every young fellow, I took it for granted that she was in love with me and ready to fall into my arms on call. Then I hadn't any plans in life, anyway, and, like a fool, believed it made no difference to her. To mix matters up still more, Hannah crowded herself into our affairs and said things to Chip, with the result that Chip got mad, ran away, and you know the rest."

"Wal," asserted Old Cy, his eyes twinkling, "the time to hug a gal is when she's willin', 'n' ye orter spunked up that night 'fore ye come away 'n' told her ye was callatin' to make yer fortin in the woods, an' that ye wanted her to wait 'n' share it — then hugged 'n' kissed her a little more by way o' bindin' the bargain, an' — knowin' that gal ez I do, she'd fought Hannah, tooth 'n' nail, 'n' walked through fire 'n' brimstun fer ye. I think, 'stead o' hidin' herself fer two years, an' changin' her name, she'd 'a' tramped clear to Grindstun jest to tell ye her troubles, 'n', if need be, she'd 'a' starved fer ye. I tell ye, boy, wimmin like her is scarce in this world, 'n' when ye find one

young 'n' pretty ez she is, hang on to her an' hang hard."

"I know it now well enough," returned Ray, ruefully; "but that don't help matters. Then that fortune you found for her makes my case all the worse, and Chip quite independent."

"It do, it do," chuckled Old Cy, as if glad of it, "an' all the more need o' you hustlin'. It's a case o' woodchuck with ye now. But don't git discouraged. Jest dig. Chip's worth it, ten times over, 'n' no man ever worked to win a woman 'thout bein' bettered by it."

It was terse and homely advice, and not only convinced Ray that he had neglected one whom he now felt meant home, wife, happiness, and all that life might mean for him, but made him realize that all possible striving and self-denial must be made in atonement. With whom and what sort of people Chip had found asylum, he knew not. What influence they would have upon her feelings was an equally unknown matter; and worse than that, the ogre of another suitor for Chip's favor now entered Ray's calculations, and the slang truism, "There are others," was with him every waking moment — a much-deserved punishment, all womankind will say.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

One day while Aunt Abby and Chip were enjoying the newly furnished home of Uncle Jud, a capacious carriage drawn by a handsome pair of horses halted there and Martin and Angie alighted.

"We are taking a cross-country drive for an outing," he explained, after Angie had kissed Chip tenderly and greetings had been exchanged. "We have waited for you, Miss Runaway, to come and visit us," he added, turning to Chip, "until we couldn't wait any longer and so came to look for you. We have also some news that may interest you. Old Cy has been heard from at last. He spent a year looking for you. He has now gone into the woods, to my camp, where Ray located for the winter, and when spring comes, I can guess where they will head for."

How welcome this news was to Chip, her face fully indicated; but neither Martin nor Angie realized how much or for what reason it interested this soft-voiced, gracious lady whom Chip called Aunt Abby. They knew Uncle Jud was Old Cy's

brother and that they had once been sailors from Bayport, but the long-ago romance of Aunt Abby's life was unknown to them.

And now ensued a welcome to the callers such as only Uncle Jud and Aunt Mandy could offer.

"We sorter feel we robbed ye o' Vera," Uncle Jud explained, "though 'twa'n't any intention on our part, an' so ye must gin us some chance to make amends. We callate 'twa'n't no fault o' yourn, either, only one o' them happenin's that was luck for us."

That evening was one long to be remembered by all who were present, for Chip's history, as told by Martin and Angie, was the entertaining topic, and its humorous side was made the most of by Martin. Chip was in no wise annoyed by Martin's fun-making, either. Instead, conscious of the good-will and affection of the friends who had rescued her from the wilderness, she rather enjoyed, it and laughed heartily at Martin's description of various incidents, especially her first appearance in their camp, and the language she used.

"I couldn't help swearing," she explained. "I never had heard much except 'cuss' words. I think also now, as I recall my life at Tim's Place,

I would never have dared that desperate mode of escape had I not been hardened by such a life. I wish I could see Old Tomah once more," she added musingly, "and I'd like to send him some gift. He was the best-hearted Indian I ever saw or heard of, and his queer teachings about spites and how they rewarded us for good deeds and punished us for evil ones was no harm, for it set me thinking. The one thought that encouraged me most during those awful days and nights alone in the woods was the belief that among the spites which I was sure followed me was my mother's soul. I've never changed in my belief, either, and shall always feel that she guided me to your camp."

Uncle Jud also obtained his share of fun at Chip's expense, describing his finding of her with humorous additions.

"She was all beat out that night I found her on top o' Bangall Hill, 'n' yet when I asked her if she'd run away from some poor farm, she was ready to claw my eyes out, an' dunno's I blame her. I was innocent, too, fer I really s'posed she had."

Martin's visit at this hospitable home was not allowed to terminate for a week, for visitors sel-

dom came here, and Uncle Jud, as big a boy as his brother when the chance came, planned all sorts of trips and outings to entertain them, and quite characteristic affairs they were, too.

One day they drove to a wood-bordered pond far up the valley, fished a few hours for pickerel and perch, and had a fish fry and picnic dinner.

The next day they visited a strange, romantic grotto up in the mountains, known as the Wolf's Den, and here a table was set, broiled chicken, sweet corn, and such toothsome fare formed the meal, with nut-gathering for amusement.

Squirrel and partridge shooting also furnished Martin a little excitement. When he and Angie insisted that they must leave, both host and hostess showed genuine regret. A few remarks made by Angie to her former protégée, in private, the last evening of this visit, may be quoted.

"I must insist, my dear child," she said, "that you make us a visit in the near future. You left us under an entirely false impression and it has grieved me more than you can imagine. There was never a word of truth in anything that Hannah said. She was spiteful and malicious and desired to get even with you for a hurt to her pride. We had no thought of hurrying away to the woods

to separate you and Ray for any reason whatever. Of course, as you must know, I had no suspicion of any attachment between you, and if I had, I certainly should not have tried to break it off in that way. That is a matter that concerns only you and him. My own life experience shows that first love is the wisest and best, and while you were both too young then for an engagement, you must believe me when I tell you that I had no wish to interfere."

And so the breach was healed.

This visit of the Frisbies to Peaceful Valley also awakened something of repentance in Chip's mind, and more mature now, it occurred to her that leaving Greenvale as she did, was, after all, childish.

Then Angie's part in this drama of her life now returned to Chip in a new light. Once she began to reflect, her self-accusation grew apace and her repentance as well. Now she began to see herself as she was at Tim's Place.

"I think I treated my Greenvale friends very ungratefully," she said to Aunt Abby one evening after they had returned to Christmas Cove once more, "and what Mrs. Frisbie said to me has made me realize it. I know now that few would

have done what she did for me. I was an ignorant, dirty, homeless creature and no relation of hers, and yet she took charge of me, bought me clothes, paid all my expenses going to Greenvale, clothed me there, and always treated me nicely without my even asking for it.

"The Frisbies certainly ran some risk by keeping me at their cabin when they knew that half-breed was after me. I don't know why they should have done all this. I was nothing to them. And yet when I recall the night I stumbled into their camp, how Mrs. Frisbie dressed me in her own clothes, shared her tent with me, and even prayed for me, I feel ashamed to think of what I have done. I did think that Mrs. Frisbie despised me from what Hannah said. I know now that I was wrong, and running away as I did, was very ungrateful."

"I think it was, myself," responded Aunt Abby, "and yet believing as you did, Mrs. Frisbie ought not to blame you. I don't think she does, either. She seems a very sensible woman, and I like her. You made your mistake in not confiding in her more. You should have gone to her as you would to a mother, in the first place, and told her just what Hannah had said to you and how you felt

about it. To brood over such matters and imagine the worst possible, is unwise in any one. I think from what you have told me, that this person who sneered against you so much must have had a spite against you."

"Hannah was jealous, I know," Chip interrupted, smiling at the recollection, "and I hurt her feelings because I asked her why she didn't shave."

"Didn't shave!" exclaimed Aunt Abby, wide-eyed, "what do you mean?"

"Why, she has whiskers, you see," laughed Chip, "almost as much as some men — a nice little mustache and some on her chin. I told her the next day after I got there I thought she was a man dressed as a woman. I snickered, too, I remember, when I said it, for she looked so comical — like a goat, almost — and then I asked her why she didn't shave. I guess she laid it up against me ever after."

"She revenged herself amply, it seems," answered Aunt Abby.

When Christmas neared, and with it a vacation for Chip, new impulses came to her: a desire to visit Greenvale once more and make amends as best she could to her friends there; and her gift-

giving desire was quickened by the coming holidays. She now felt that she had ample means to gratify this latter wish. Day by day, since meeting Angie again, her sense of obligation had increased, and now it was in her power at Christmastide to repay at least a little of the debt.

Others were also included in this generous project: Uncle Jud, Aunt Mandy, her foster-mother, Aunt Abby, as well; and then there was Old Cy, whom most of all she now desired to make glad. That was impossible, however. He was still an absent wanderer, and so, as it ever is and ever will be, some thread of regret, some note of sorrow, must be woven into all joys.

A rapid and almost wonderful growth of this yule-tide impulse now swept over Chip, so much so that it must be told. At first it took shape in the intended purchase of comparative trifles, — a fishing-rod for Uncle Jud, a pipe for Martin, gloves for Aunt Abby, and so on. Then as that seemingly vast fortune, now hers to spend, occurred to Chip, and her sense of obligation as well, the intended gifts increased in proportion until a costly picture of some camp or wildwood scene for Angie and a valuable watch for Miss Phinney were decided upon.

Her plans as to how to obtain these presents also took shape. Riverton was the only place where they could be obtained. To that village she would go first, obtain the money needed, devote one entire day to making her purchases, and then go on to Greenvale and astonish these good friends from whom she was once so eager to escape.

It was all a most delightful episode which was now anticipated by Chip. Again and again she lived it over, especially her arrival in Greenvale, and how like a Lady Bountiful she would present her gifts to her friends.

So eager was she thus to make some compensation to them that lessons became irksome, the day seemed weeks in length, and she could scarce sleep when bedtime came.

But the slow days dragged by at last, and then Chip, happier than ever before in her life, dressed in her best, bade Aunt Abby good-bye and started on her journey alone.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"A man braggin' gits riled if ye try 'n' choke him off."
—Old Cy Walker.

Riverton, less provincial than Greenvale, was a village of some two thousand inhabitants. A few brick blocks, with less pretentious wooden buildings, formed a nucleus of stores. A brownstone bank, four churches, two hotels, the Quaboag House and the Astor House were intermingled among these, and a railroad with two trains in each direction a day added life and interest to the place. Each of the hotels sent a conveyance to meet every train, with a loud-voiced emissary to announce the fact of free transportation. In each hostelry a bar flourished, and like rival clubs, each had its afternoon and evening gathering of loafers who swapped yarns and gossip, smoked and chewed incessantly, and contributed little else to support the establishments. Three times daily, at meal hours, each of the rival landlords banged a discordant gong in his front doorway, without apparent result.

At about eleven in the forenoon each week-day in summer, Uncle Joe Barnes on his lumbering two-horse stage, arrived from Greenvale, paused at the post-office, threw off a mail-pouch, thence around to the Quaboag House stable, and cared for his horses. At two he was ready for the return trip and mounting his lofty seat, he again drove to the front of the hotel, shouting "All aboard!" dismounted to assist lady passengers, but let masculine ones do their own climbing, and after halting to receive a mail-bag, again departed on his return trip.

A certain monotonous regularity was apparent in every move and every act and function of village life in Riverton. At precisely seven o'clock each morning the two landlords appeared simultaneously and banged their gongs. At twelve and six, this was repeated. At eight o'clock the three principal storekeepers usually entered their places of business; at nine, and while the academy bell was ringing near by, every village doctor might be seen starting out. At ten exactly, Dwight Bennett, the cashier of the bank, unlocked its front door, and the two hotel 'buses invariably started so nearly together that they met at the first turn going stationward. Even the four church

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clocks had the same habit, and it was often related that a stranger there, a travelling man, on his first visit, made an amusing discovery.

"What kind of a fool clock have you got in this town?" he said to Sam Gates, the landlord of the Quaboag, next morning after his arrival. "I went to bed in good season last night an' just got asleep when I heard it strike thirty-two. I dozed off an' the next I knew it began clanging again, and I counted forty-four. What sort of time do you keep here, anyway? Do you run your town by the multiplication table?"

The half-dozen chronic loafers who met every afternoon in the Quaboag House office arrived in about the same order, smoked, drank, told their yarns, gathered all the gossip, and departed at nearly the same moment. Their evening visits partook of the same clocklike regularity.

These of the old guard were also dressed much the same, and "slouchy" best describes it. Gray flannel shirts in winter or summer alike. Collars, cuffs, and ties were never seen on them, though patches were, and as for shaving or hair-cutting, a few shaved once a week, some never did, and semi-annual hair-cuts were a fair average.

The worst sinner in this respect, Luke Atwater,

occasionally called "Lazy Luke," never had his beard shortened but once, and that was due to its being burnt off while he was fighting a brush fire in spring.

It was related of him, and believed by many, that once upon a time many years previous he had had his hair cut, and on that occasion the barber had found a whetstone concealed in Luke's shock of tangled hair. It was also asserted that he admitted always carrying his whetstone back of his ear while mowing, and so losing it that way.

All the news and every happening in Riverton, from the catching of an extra big trout to twins, was duly commented upon and discussed by this coterie. Village politics, how much money each storekeeper was making, crop prospects, the run of sap every spring, drouth, weather indications, rain or snow falls, each and all formed rotating subjects upon which every one of this faithful-to-the-post clique expressed opinions.

Chip's arrival there with the Frisbie family, and her later history, learned from Uncle Joe, furnished a fertile topic, her escapade in running away from Greenvale a more exciting one, while Old Cy's visit and deposit of a fabulous sum in the bank in her name had been a nine days'

wonder. That amount, hinted at only by the cashier as a comfortable fortune, soon grew in size until it was generally believed to be almost a million.

This was Riverton and its decidedly rural status when late one December afternoon the Quaboag free 'bus (a two-seated pung, this time) swept up to that hotel's front door, where the porter assisted a stylish young lady to alight, and he, stepping like a drum major, led the way into the Quaboag's unwarmed parlor.

"Young lady, sir, a stunner, wants room over night, sir," he announced to the landlord in the office a moment later. "Goin' to Greenvale to-morrer, she says."

On the instant all converse in the office ceased, and the six constant callers hardly breathed until Sam Gates hastened to the parlor and returned.

"It's that McGuire gal — lady, I mean," he asserted pompously; then to the porter, "Git a move on, Jim, 'n' start a fire in Number 6, an' quick, too!" And hastily brushing his untidy hair before the office mirror, he left the room again, followed by six envious glances. Then those astonished loafers grouped themselves, the better to observe the passage between parlor and office.

Only one instant sight of this important guest was obtained by them as Chip emerged from the parlor and followed the landlord upstairs, and then the hushed spell was broken.

"By gosh, it's her!" exclaimed one in an awed whisper, "an' Jim was right, she's a stunner!"

"I 'member jest how she looked that fust day she came," asserted another. "Saw her legs, too, when she shinned up top o' the stage."

"Ye won't git 'nother chance, I'll bet!" declared a third.

"What do ye s'pose she's here for," queried a fourth, "to draw the int'rest on her money, or what?"

It was precisely four-forty-five when Chip appeared before this judge and jury of all Riverton's happenings. At five-forty-five they had agreed that she was the handsomest young lady who had ever set foot in the town, that she must be going to get married soon, and that her mission there was to draw out a few thousand dollars for wedding finery. Then they dispersed, and at six-forty-five, when they assembled at the Quaboag again, half of Riverton knew their conclusions, and by bedtime all knew them.

By eight-thirty next morning, this all-observant

and all-wise clique had gathered in the hotel office once more, an unusual proceeding, and when Chip tripped out, eight pairs of eyes watched her depart. Then they dispersed.

At nine o'clock Chip walked up the stone steps to the bank door, read the legend, "Open from 10 A.M. until 2 P.M.," turned away, and once more resumed her leisurely stroll up and down the street while she peered into store windows. At ten precisely by the four church clocks she was back at the bank again, and the cashier lost count of the column he was adding when he saw her enter.

"I would like three hundred dollars, if you please, sir," she said, presenting her little book, and he had to count it over four times, to make sure the amount was right. Then he passed the thick bundle of currency out under his latticed window, seeing only the two wide-open, fathomless eyes and dimpled face that had watched him, and feeling, as he afterward admitted, like fifty cents.

And now ensued an experience the like of which poor Chip had never even dreamed, — the supreme joy of spending money without stint for those near and dear to her. And what a medley of gifts she bought! Two silk dress patterns, two warm

wraps, three winter hats, a gold watch for Miss Phinney, an easy-chair, two of the finest pipes she could find, a trout rod, four pairs of gloves, and finally a gun for Nezer. Then as her roll of money grew less, she began to pick up smaller articles, — handkerchiefs, slippers, and the like.

"Send them to the hotel, please," she said to one and all of whom she purchased articles of any size, "marked for Vera McGuire."

That was enough!

Riverton had sensations, mild ones, of course. Now and then a fire had occurred, once an elopement. Occasionally a horse ran away, causing damage to some one. But nothing had occurred to compare with the arrival of a supposed fabulously rich young lady who came without escort, who walked into and out of stores like a young goddess, noticing no one, and who spent money as if it were autumn leaves.

A few of the Quaboag retinue followed her about in a not-to-be-observed manner. Women by the dozen hastily donned outdoor raiment, and visited stores, just to observe her. They crossed and recrossed the street to meet her, and a battery of curious eyes was focussed on her for two hours.

When she returned to the hotel, the old guard,

recruited by every idle man in town, filled the office, awaiting her. Uncle Joe, who had heard of her arrival the moment he came, was among them, recounting her history once more, and when she neared the hotel, he emerged to meet her.

"Why, bless yer eyes, Chip," he said, extending a calloused hand, "but I'm powerful glad to see ye once more. Whatever made ye run away the way ye did, 'n' what be ye doin' here? Buyin' out the hull town? I've got the pung filled wi' bundles a'ready wi' yer name on 'em."

He beaued her into the parlor, like the ancient gallant he was. He washed, brushed his hair and clothing, and awaited her readiness to dine, without holding further converse with the curious crowd. He ushered her into the dining room and made bold to sit and eat with her unasked, and when he assisted her to the front seat in his long box sleigh, crowded with her purchases, and drove away, he was envied by two dozen observers.

"Why didn't ye send us word o' yer comin'," he said as they left Riverton, "so I cud 'a' spruced up some an' come down with a better rig, bells on the hosses and new buffler robes?"

"There was no need of that," answered Chip, pleased, as well she might be. "I am just the same

girl that I always was, only happier now that I have more friends. How is dear old Aunt Comfort, and every one in Greenvale? I am anticipating seeing them so much."

And never during all the twenty years in which Uncle Joe had journeyed twice each day over this road had the way seemed shorter, or had he been blessed with a more interesting companion.

The only regret Chip had, was that she had forgotten to buy Uncle Joe a present. She made up for it later, however.

At Greenvale, Chip met almost an ovation. Aunt Comfort kissed her and cried over her. Nezer ran for Angie, who soon appeared on the scene, and Hannah was so "flustered" she was unable to speak after the first greeting. Martin, who had heard of Chip's arrival from Uncle Joe, hastened to Aunt Comfort's, and had Chip been a real "millionnairess" or some titled lady, she could not have awakened more interest or received half so cordial a welcome.

Hannah was the one who felt the most embarrassed, however, and guilty as well. For half an hour, while Chip was the centre of interest, she could only stare at her in dumb amazement. Then she stole out of the room, and later Chip found her in the kitchen, shedding copious tears.

"I'm a miserable sinner 'n' the Lord'll never forgive me," she half moaned, when Chip tried to console her. "An' to think ye feel the way ye say, 'n' to bring me a present, arter all the mean things I said. It's a-heapin' coals o' fire on my head, that it is." And the shower increased.

"I have forgotten all about them, Hannah, truly I have," Chip assured her, "and I wish you would. You didn't understand me then, perhaps, or I you, so let us be friends now."

The next afternoon Chip, who had learned that Miss Phinney's school was to close the day following, set out to call on her in time to arrive at its adjournment.

No hint of her return had reached Miss Phinney, no letters had been exchanged, and not since that tearful separation had they met.

And now as Chip followed the lonely by-road so often traversed by her, what a flood of bitter-sweet memories returned, — each bend, each tree, each rock, and the bridge over the Mizzy held a different recollection. Here at this turn she had first met Ray, after her resolve to leave Greenvale. At the next landmark, a lane crossing the meadows, she had always parted from her teacher, the last time in tears. And how long, long ago it all seemed!

Then beyond, and barely visible, was the dear old schoolhouse. She could see it now, half hid in the bushes, a lone and lowly little brown building outlined on the winter landscape and apparently dwarfed in size. Once it had awed her; now it seemed pathetic.

The last of its pupils were vanishing as Chip drew near, and inside, and as lonely as that lone temple, Miss Phinney still lingered.

That day had not gone well with her. A note of complaint had come from one parent that morning, and news that a dearly loved scholar was ill as well, and Miss Phinney's own life seemed like the fields just now — cold, desolate, and snow-covered.

And then while she, thus lone and lonesome, was putting away books, slates, ink-bottles, and all the badges of her servitude, Chip, without knocking, walked in.

How they first exclaimed, then embraced, then kissed, and then repeated it while each tried to wink the tears away, and failed; how they sat hand in hand in that dingy, smoke-browned room with its knife-hacked benches, unconscious of the chill, while Chip told her story; and how, just as the last rays of the setting sun flashed from the icicles along its eaves, they left it, still hand in hand,

was but an episode such as many a schoolgirl can recall.

Of the few friends Greenvale held for Chip, none seemed quite so near and dear as Miss Phinney, and none lived longer in her memory. They had been for many months not teacher and pupil, but rather two sisters, confiding, patient, and tender. Life swept them apart. They might never meet again, and yet, so long as both lived, never would those school days be forgotten.

With Sunday came Chip's most gratifying experience, perhaps, for her arrival was now known by the entire village and the fact that she was an heiress as well. Her fortune (also known) was considered almost fabulous according to Greenvale standards, and when Chip with Angie entered the church porch, it was crowded with people waiting to receive them. Chip, of course, now well clad and well poised, was once more the cynosure of all eyes except when the pastor prayed. At the close of service a score, most of whom she knew by sight only, waited to greet her and shake hands with her in the porch. The parson hurried down the aisle to add his smile and hand clasp, and, all in all, it was a most gratifying reception.

And here and now, let no carping critic say it was

all due to that bank account, but rather a country town's expression of respect and good-will toward one whom they felt deserved it.

That it all pleased Angie, goes without saying. That Chip well deserved this vindication, no one will question; and when her visit ended and she departed, no one, not even Miss Phinney, missed her more than Angie.

Only one thread of regret wove itself into Chip's feelings as she rode away with Uncle Joe, whose horses were now decked properly for this important event. She had received a most cordial reception on all sides — almost a triumph of good-will. Her gifts had brought an oft-repeated chorus of thanks and a few tears. On all sides and among all she had been welcome, even receiving a call and words of praise from Parson Jones. She was a *nobody* no longer; instead, a *somebody* whom all delighted to honor and commend.

But the one whose motherly pride would have been most gratified, she for whom Chip's heart yearned for oftenest, would never know it.

CHAPTER XL

With the birds and flowers once more returning to Christmas Cove, came outdoor freedom for Chip again. Like the wood-nymph she was in character and taste, the wild, rock-bound coast outside and the low, wooded mountain enclosing this village were her playgrounds where she found companionship. Other associates she cared but little for, and a few hours alone on a wave-washed shore, watching the wild ocean billows tossing spray aloft, or a long ramble in a deep, silent forest, appealed to her far more than parties and girlish enjoyments.

The wood-bordered road, leading from the village to the railroad ten miles away, was now a favorite walk of hers. It was suited to her in many ways, for it was seldom travelled; it followed the sunny side of the low mountain range back of Christmas Cove, not a house stood along its entire way, and to add charm, a brook kept it company, crossing and recrossing it for two miles. That feature was the most especial attraction, for beds of watercress waved beneath the limpid waters in deep pools,

bunches of flag grew along its banks, their blue flowers bending to kiss the current; its ripples danced in the sunlight; its music was a tinkling melody, and these simple attractions appealed to Chip.

There was also another reason for now choosing this byway walk. She knew, or felt sure, that Ray would visit Christmas Cove on his return from the woods. He must come in the old carryall, — about the only vehicle ever journeying along this road, — and now, like a brownie of the forest, she watched until she spied it afar and then hid in the bushes and peeped out until it passed each day.

A curious and somewhat complex feeling toward this young man had also come to her. At first, like a child, she had loved him unasked. She had known no different. He had seemed like a young god to her, and to cling to him was supreme happiness. Then had come an awakening, a consciousness that this freedom was not right and must be checked. Following that also — a bitter lesson — it had come to her that she was a kind of outcast, a child of shame, as it were, whose origin was despicable, and who was dependent upon the charity of others. This awakening, this new consciousness, was like a black chasm in front of her, a horror and

shame combined, and true to her nature, she fled from it like one pursued.

But two years had changed her views of humanity. She had learned that money and social position did not always win friends and respect. That birth and ancestry were of less consideration than a pure mind and honest intentions, and that fine raiment sometimes covered a base heart and vile nature.

Toward this boyish lover, also, her feelings had been altered. A little of the old-time fondness remained, however. She could not put that away. She had tried and tried earnestly, yet the wildwood illusion still lingered. She had meant, also, to put him and herself quite apart — so far, and in such a way, that she would never be found by him. That had failed, however; he knew where she was. He had said that he was coming here. Most likely he would expect to renew the old tender relations; but in that he would be disappointed. She was sure she would be glad to see him for old times' sake, however. She would be gracious and dignified, as Aunt Abby was. She wanted to hear all about the woods and Old Cy again, but caresses must be forbidden. More than that, every time she recalled how freely she had permitted them once, she blushed and felt that it would be an effort to look him in the face again.

But she was anxious to see how he would appear now: whether the same boy, with frank, open face, or a commanding, self-possessed man.

And so each pleasant afternoon she strolled up this byway road. When the ancient carryall was sighted, she hid and watched until it passed.

But Captain Mix, its driver, also had observing eyes. He knew her now as far as he could see her, as every one in the village did, and he soon noticed her unusual conduct. He also watched along the wayside where she left it, and slyly observed her peeping out from some thicket. Just why this odd proceeding happened time and again, he could not guess, and not until a strange young man alighted from the train one day and asked to be left at the home of Mrs. Abby Bemis, did it dawn on him.

Then he laughed. "Friend o' Aunt Abby, I 'spose?" he inquired in his Yankee fashion, after they had started.

"No," answered Ray, frankly, "I have never seen the lady. I know some one who is living with her, however. A Miss Mc — Raymond, I mean."

Captain Mix glanced at him, his eyes twinkling. "So ye're 'quainted with Vera, be ye," he responded. "Wal, ye're lucky." Then as curiosity grew he added, "Known her quite a spell, hev ye?"

But Ray was discreet. "Oh, three or four years," he answered nonchalantly. "I knew her when she lived in Greenvale." Then to check the stage-driver's curiosity, he added, "She was only a little girl, then. I presume she has changed since."

"She's a purty good-lookin' gal now," asserted Captain Mix, "but middlin' odd in her ways. Not much on gallivantin' round wi' young folks, but goin' to school stiddy 'n' roamin' round the woods when she ain't. Purty big gal to be goin' to school she is. I callate her arly eddication must 'a' been sorter neglected. Mebbe ye know 'bout it," and once more this persistent Yankee glanced at his companion.

But Ray was too loyal to the little girl he loved to discuss her further, and made no answer. Instead, he began inquiries about Christmas Cove, and as they jogged on mile after mile, he learned all that was to be known of that quiet village. When they had reached a point some three miles from it, a kindly thought came to the driver.

"If Vera ain't 'spectin' ye," he said, "mebbe ye'd like to s'prise her. If so be it, ye kin. She's 'most allus out this way 'n', curislike, hides 'fore I get 'long whar she is. If I see her to-day, 'n' ye want to, I'll drop ye clus by 'n' let ye."

And so it came to pass.

Chip, as usual, had followed her oft-taken walk on this pleasant May afternoon. When the carryall was sighted also, as usual, she had hidden herself. With beating heart she saw two occupants this time, and looking out of her laurel screen, she saw that one was Ray.

Then she crouched lower. The moment she had waited for had come.

But now something unexpected happened, for after the carryall passed her hiding spot, Ray, brown and stalwart, leaped out. The carryall drove on, and she saw him returning and scanning the bushes.

She was caught, fairly and squarely. One instant she hesitated, then, blushing rose-red, emerged from the undergrowth.

And now came another capture, for with a "Chip, my darling," Ray sprang forward, and although she turned away, the next moment she was clasped in his arms.

In vain she struggled. In vain she writhed and twisted. In vain she pushed him away and then covered her blushing face.

Love, fierce and eager, could not be thus opposed. All her pride, anger, resentment, shame, and intended coldness were as so many straws, for despite her

struggles, he pulled her hands aside and kissed her again and again.

"My darling," he exclaimed at last, "say you forgive me; say you love me; say it now!"

Then, as she drew away, he saw her eyes were brimming with tears.

"I won't," she said, "I hate —" but his lips cut the sentence in two, and it was never finished.

"I did mean to hate you," she declared once more, covering her face, "but I — I can't."

"No, you can't," he asserted eagerly, "for I won't let you. You promised to love me once, and now you've got to, for life."

And she did.

When the outburst of emotion had subsided and they strolled homeward, Chip glanced shyly up at her lover.

"Why did you pounce on me so?" she queried; "why didn't you ask me, first?"

"My dear," he answered, "a wise man kisses the girl first, and asks her afterwards." Then he repeated the offence.

And now what a charming summer of sweet illusion and castle-building followed for the lovers! How Aunt Abby smiled benignly upon them, quite content to accord ample chance for wooing! How

"I did mean to hate you, but I — I can't."

many blissful, dreamy hours they passed on lonely wave-washed cliffs, while the marvel of love was discussed! How its wondrous magic opened a new world whose walks were flower-decked, whose sky was ever serene, where lilies bloomed, birds sang, sea winds whispered of time and eternity, and where Chip was an adored queen! How all the shame and humiliation of her past life faded away and joy supreme entered on the azure and golden wings of this new morning! Even Old Cy was almost forgotten; the spites, Old Tomah, and Tim's Place quite so; and all hope, all joy, all protection, and all her future centred in the will and wishes of this Prince Perfect.

"Blind and foolish," I hear some fair critic say. Yes, more than that, almost idiotic; for selfish man never pursues unless forced to do so, and an object of worship once possessed, is but a summer flower.

CHAPTER XLI

"A man'll hev all the friends he kin keer for if he tends to his own knittin' work." — OLD CY WALKER.

QUITE different from the meeting of the lovers was that which occurred when Old Cy reached Peaceful Valley. There were no heroics, no falling upon one another's necks, no tears. Just a "Hullo, Cyrus!" "Hullo, Judson!" as these two brothers clasped hands, and forty years were bridged.

Aunt Mandy, however, showed more emotion, for when Old Cy rather awkwardly stooped to kiss her, the long ago of Sister Abby's sorrow welled up in her heart, and the tears came.

That evening's reunion, with its two life histories to be exchanged, did not close until the tall clock had ticked time into the wee, small hours.

All of Old Cy's almost marvellous adventures had to be told by him, and not the least interesting were the last few years at the wilderness home of the hermit. Chip's entry into it and her history formed another chapter fully as thrilling, with Uncle Jud's rescue of her for a *dénouement.*

The most pathetic feature of this intermingled history — the years while sweet Abby Grey waited and watched for her lover — was left untold. Only once was it referred to by Aunt Mandy, in an indirect way; but the quick lowering of Old Cy's eyes and the shadow that overspread his face, checked her at once. Almost intuitively she realized its unwisdom, and that it was a sorrow best not referred to.

Old Cy evidently felt it a subject to avoid, and not until the next day did he even ask how Aunt Abby looked or what had been her life experiences. A little of this reticence wore away in due time, however, and then Aunt Mandy once more referred to her sister.

"I kinder feel you blame Abby somehow, Cyrus, the way you act," she said, "and yet thar ain't no cause for it. She'd waited 'most seven years. We'd all given you up for dead, and life in Christmas Cove wa'n't promisin' much for Abby."

"I don't blame her a mite," Old Cy answered quickly, "an' no need o' yer thinkin' so. I don't blame no woman fer makin' the best shift they kin. They've got to hev a home 'n' pertecter, bless 'em, or be nobody in this world. Comin' here and findin' how things are, sorter makes me realize how much I've missed in life, though, an' how much sorrer I've

had to outgrow. I don't lay up nothin' 'gainst Abby, not fer a minit. Only I hated to hev ye tell me what I knew ye'd hev to, that fust night."

"But you're goin' to see her, ain't ye, Cyrus?" Aunt Mandy asked anxiously. "Ye won't shame her by not goin', will ye?"

"Wal, mebbe," he answered slowly, and after a long pause. "I wouldn't want to hurt her knowin'ly. I callate I've done more grievin'n she has, though, ten times over, an' seein' her now's a good deal like openin' an old tomb — a sorter invitin' ghosts o' old heartaches to step out. Abby's outgrowed the old times, 'n' I'm sartin, too, won't be the happier by seein' me ag'in. I may be wrong, but I've a notion she'll sorter hate to see me. 'Twas to keep her from feelin' 'shamed 'n' miserable 'n' spoilin' her life, I've never let her nor nobody that knew her find out I was alive. I'm doubtin' I would now if she hadn't larned it from Chip."

He relented a little from this strange and almost cruel whim a week later, and after visiting the Riggsville store and obtaining what really amounted to a disguise in new garments, he announced his plans.

"I've got to see Chip," he said, "an' see how she 'n' Ray's gittin' on. I've got to see Abby, I s'pose. I want to, an' I don't want to, both in one. Then

ag'in, these two young folks — Chip 'n' the boy — hev sorter got tangled up in my feelin's, 'n' I can't rest content till I've seen 'em settled in life. I'm goin' to Christmas Cove fer a day. Then back here till they hitch up, 'n' then — wal, then mebbe I'd better go to the woods ag'in. I ain't fitted by natur fer dressed-up folks."

No opposition to this unseemly outcome was made by Uncle Jud or Aunt Mandy. They knew, or hoped, the leaven of bygone memories and association would change the hermit-like impulse of Old Cy, and all in good time a better ending of his life would seem possible to him. To argue it now was apparently useless. A man so set in his ideas as to remain a homeless wanderer for almost a lifetime, was not to be changed in a month, or perhaps in a year.

Neither did Old Cy seem in a hurry to visit Christmas Cove.

"I don't look nat'ral or feel nat'ral in them new clothes," he said to Aunt Mandy one day, "an' while I want to see Abby, I've lived in the woods so long I'm sorter 'shamed to go 'mongst respectable people. Then I look like one o' them wooden men dressed up in a store winder with that new rig on, an' jest know folks'll all be laughin' at me. I've got to go, I callate, but I'd like to make the trip in a cage.

I'm sartin sure Abby'll laugh at me arterwards." From which it may be seen how hard it was for Old Cy to fit himself into civilized life once more.

He nerved himself for the trip to Christmas Cove in a few days, however, and how he met and renewed acquaintance with his old-time sweetheart shall be told in his own words.

"Abby hain't changed near so much as I callated," he said on his return; "a leetle fuller in figger, but jest the same easy-spoken, sweet sorter woman I always knew she'd be. She was 'lone when I called, an' fer a minit arter we shook hands neither on us could speak ag'in. Then she kinder bit her lip 'n' swallered her feelin's, keepin' her face turned away, an' then we sot down 'n' begun talkin'. It was techin', too, the way she acted, fer she kept tryin' to smile, 'n' all the while the tears kept startin'. It was like one o' them summer days when the rain patters while the sun is shinin'. I don't think she noticed my clothes much, either, an' we sot up till 'most midnight talkin' over old times. It all turned out 'bout the way I 'spected — a sorter funeral o' old hopes with us two fer mourners. She's powerful considerate, too, Abby is, for all the time we was talkin' she never once spoke o' Cap'n Bemis, 'n' I didn't. It was jest ez if we started in whar we left

off, 'n' skippin' the gap between. She 'lowed she hoped she'd see me soon ag'in, that she felt like a mother to Chip; an' when I bid her good-bye, she kinder choked once more.

"I didn't see much o' Chip, either, which sorter hurt me. Take it all in all, my visit thar upsot me more'n I callated, 'n' I guess when Chip's settled, I'd best go to the woods 'n' forgit all that's past. My life's been a failure, anyway."

And Old Cy was right; but it was grim and merciless Fate that made it so, and for that he was not responsible.

Love in youth is a sweet song of joy and hope and promise. But love that spans a lifetime, that reaches and caresses our heartstrings once again as we enter the final shadows, has only the pathos of parting and the tender chords of almost forgotten melodies in it. Vainly do we strive to enter the enchanted garden once more. Vainly do our heart throbs beat against its adamant walls. Vainly do we hope to catch just one more of the old bygone thrills. It is useless, for none can live life over, and once age has locked the portals of youth and fervor, they are never opened again.

CHAPTER XLII

With September came a supreme event in the lives of Chip and Ray, when Mr. and Mrs. Frisbie, Aunt Comfort, Miss Phinney and Hannah, Uncle Jud and Aunt Mandy, and Old Cy, all gathered in Aunt Abby's quaint parlor to see her aged pastor join their hands and lives. Then came the kisses, the congratulations, the rice, and old-shoe throwing, and then solitude and tears for Aunt Abby. All the wedding guests except Old Cy hied themselves away with the new pair, and he left for Bayport.

And thus closes the history of Chip McGuire, waif of the wilderness and slave of Tim's Place.

Bless her!

Two days later Old Cy returned.

No one was in the house when he knocked at Aunt Abby's door, and then, led perhaps by the invisible chord that spanned forty years, he slowly strolled up the path beside the old mill-pond, which he and she had often followed in the old, old days.

His heart had led him aright, for there, at the foot

of the ancient oak that had once been their trysting-place, she sat.

"I thought I'd come over 'n' bid ye good-bye, Abby," he said gently, as she arose to meet him. "I've been doin' a good deal o' biddin' good-bye to-day. I bid good-bye to the old graveyard whar my folks is; it's all growed up to weeds 'n' bushes, I'm sorry to say. But that can't be helped. It's the way o' natur. I've been down to the p'int whar you 'n' I used to go, an' I bid that good-bye," he added, seating himself near her. "Ye 'member it, don't ye, Abby, 'n' them days when we went thar to watch the waves?"

"I do, Cyrus," she answered, her voice trembling. "I remember all the old days only too well."

"They all come back to me, too," he continued in a lower tone, "an' I wish I could skip back to 'em, but I can't. I'm an old man now, an' no use to nobody, 'n' not much to myself. I've been a wanderer many years — ye know why, Abby. I've had a short spell o' joy, kinder helpin' this boy 'n' gal into sunshine 'n' a home. They've gone their way now 'n' sure to forgit me an' you. It's nat'ral they should, 'n' all that's left me is to go back to the woods 'n' stay."

He paused a moment, glancing up the narrow

pond to where it ended in shadow, and then continued: "It's curis, Abby, how life begins with how-de-do's 'n' smilin' friends 'n' cheerin' prospects, 'n' then ends with good-byes 'n' bein' forgot. It's what we must callate on, though, an' a good deal like a graveyard is left to weeds 'n' bushes."

Once more he paused, closed his eyes, and remained silent for a time.

"Wal, I might as well be goin'," he said finally, rising and extending his hand, "so good-bye, Abby. I wish ye well in life."

"But is there any need of it?" she answered, turning her face to hide the tears as his hand clasped hers.

"Why, no, only to fergit my sorrer," he answered; "I can't do it here."

"But who will care for you there — at last — and — must you go?" Then she turned to him again.

And then he saw, not the gentle, saddened face upraised to his, but the tender face of sweet Abby Grey of the long, long ago.

"Must you leave us — me?" she whispered once again.

"Wal, mebbe not," he answered.

THE END

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